

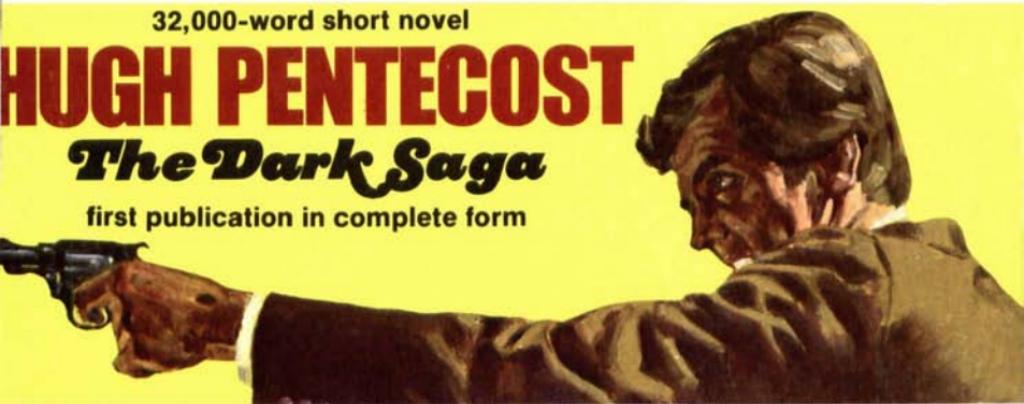
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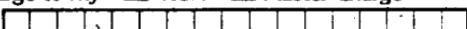
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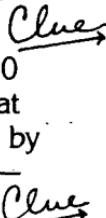
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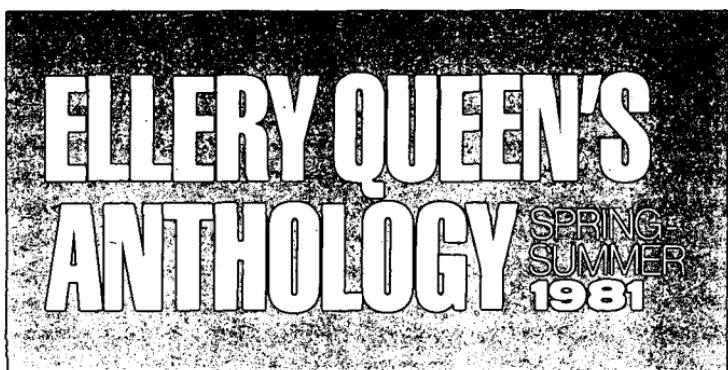
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INTRODUCTION

Dear Reader:

One gift the fairies gave me: (three
They commonly bestowed of yore)
The love of books, the golden key
That opens the enchanted door.

—Andrew Lang's *Ballade of the Bookworm*, Stanza 2

The fairies have given you that gift—this book in your hands is proof. You hold the golden key to one short novel, never before published in complete form, and 18 short stories, all exciting and baffling mysteries, and to solve them you have but to turn the key—to open the enchanted door.

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ELLERY QUEEN



A PREFATORY TALE

H. G. WELLS

The Door in the Wall

"By our daylight standard he walked out of security into darkness, danger, and death" . . .

One confidential evening, not three months ago, Lionel Wallace told me this story of the Door in the Wall. And at the time I thought that so far as he was concerned it was a true story.

He told it to me with such a direct simplicity of conviction that I could not do otherwise than believe in him. But in the morning, in my own flat, I woke to a different atmosphere, and as I lay in bed and recalled the things he had told me, stripped of the glamour of his earnest slow voice, denuded of the focussed, shaded table light, the shadowy atmosphere that wrapped about him and me, and the pleasant bright things, the dessert and glasses and napery of the dinner we had shared, making them for the time a bright little world quite cut off from everyday realities, I saw it all as frankly incredible. "He was mystifying!" I said, and then: "How well he did it! . . . It isn't quite the thing I should have expected him, of all people, to do well."

Afterwards as I sat up in bed and sipped my morning tea, I found myself trying to account for the flavour of reality that perplexed me in his impossible reminiscences, by supposing they did in some way suggest, present, convey—I hardly know which word to use—experiences it was otherwise impossible to tell.

Well, I don't resort to that explanation now. I have got over my intervening doubts. I believe now, as I believed at the moment of telling, that Wallace did to the very best of his ability strip the truth of his secret for me. But whether he himself saw, or only thought he saw, whether he himself was the possessor of an inestimable privilege or the victim of a fantastic dream, I cannot pretend to guess. Even the facts of his death, which ended my doubts forever,

throw no light on that.

That much the reader must judge for himself.

I forget now what chance comment or criticism of mine moved so reticent a man to confide in me. He was, I think, defending himself against an imputation of slackness and unreliability I had made in relation to a great public movement, in which he had disappointed me. But he plunged suddenly. "I have," he said, "a preoccupation—

"I know," he went on, after a pause, "I have been negligent. The fact is—it isn't a case of ghosts or apparitions—but—it's an odd thing to tell of, Redmond—I am haunted. I am haunted by something—that rather takes the light out of things, that fills me with longings . . ."

He paused, checked by that English shyness that so often overcomes us when we would speak of moving or grave or beautiful things. "You were at Saint Æthelstan's all through," he said, and for a moment that seemed to me quite irrelevant. "Well"—and he paused. Then, very haltingly at first, but afterwards more easily, he began to tell of the thing that was hidden in his life, the haunting memory of a beauty and a happiness that filled his heart with insatiable longings, that made all the interests and spectacles of worldly life seem dull and tedious and vain to him.

Now that I have the clue to it, the thing seems written visibly in his face. I have a photograph in which that look of detachment has been caught and intensified. It reminds me of what a woman once said of him—a woman who had loved him greatly. "Suddenly," she said, "the interest goes out of him. He forgets you. He doesn't care a rap for you—under his very nose . . ."

Yet the interest was not always out of him, and when he was holding his attention to a thing Wallace could contrive to be an extremely successful man. His career, indeed, is set with successes. He left me behind him long ago: he soared up over my head, and cut a figure in the world that I couldn't cut—anyhow. He was still a year short of forty, and they say now that he would have been in office and very probably in the new Cabinet if he had lived. At school he always beat me without effort—as it were by nature. We were at school together at Saint Æthelstan's College in West Kensington for almost all our schooltime. He came into the school as my co-equal, but he left far above me, in a blaze of scholarships and brilliant performance. Yet I think I made a fair average running. And it was at school I heard first of the "Door in the Wall"—that I was to hear of a second time only a month before his death.

To him at least the Door in the Wall was a real door, leading through a real wall to immortal realities. Of that I am now quite assured.

And it came into his life quite early, when he was a little fellow between five and six. I remember how, as he sat making his confession to me with a slow gravity, he reasoned and reckoned the date of it. "There was," he said, "a crimson Virginia creeper in it—all one bright uniform crimson, in a clear amber sunshine against a white wall. That came into the impression somehow, though I don't clearly remember how, and there were horse-chestnut leaves upon the clean pavement outside the green door. They were blotched yellow and green, you know, not brown nor dirty, so that they must have been new-fallen. I take it that means October. I look out for horse-chestnut leaves every year and I ought to know."

"If I'm right in that, I was about five years and four months old."

He was, he said, rather a precocious little boy—he learned to talk at an abnormally early age, and he was so sane and "old-fashioned," as people say, that he was permitted an amount of initiative that most children scarcely attain by seven or eight. His mother died when he was two, and he was under the less vigilant and authoritative care of a nursery governess. His father was a stern, preoccupied lawyer, who gave him little attention, and expected great things of him. For all his brightness he found life a little grey and dull, I think. And one day he wandered.

He could not recall the particular neglect that enabled him to get away, nor the course he took among the West Kensington roads. All that had faded among the incurable blurs of memory. But the white wall and the green door stood out quite distinctly.

As his memory of that childish experience ran, he did at the very first sight of that door experience a peculiar emotion, an attraction, a desire to get to the door and open it and walk in. And at the same time he had the clearest conviction that either it was unwise or it was wrong of him—he could not tell which—to yield to this attraction. He insisted upon it as a curious thing that he knew from the very beginning—unless memory has played him the queerest trick—that the door was unfastened, and that he could go in as he chose.

I seem to see the figure of that little boy, drawn and repelled. And it was very clear in his mind, too, though why it should be so was never explained, that his father would be very angry if he went in through that door.

Wallace described all these moments of hesitation to me with the utmost particularity. He went right past the door, and then, with his hands in his pockets and making an infantile attempt to whistle, strolled right along beyond the end of the wall. There he recalls a number of mean dirty shops, and particularly that of a plumber and decorator with a dusty disorder of earthenware pipes, sheet lead, ball taps, pattern books of wallpaper, and tins of enamel. He stood pretending to examine these things, and *coveting*, passionately desiring, the green door.

Then, he said, he had a gust of emotion. He made a run for it, lest hesitation should grip him again; he went plump with outstretched hand through the green door and let it slam behind him. And so, in a trice, he came into the garden that has haunted all his life.

It was very difficult for Wallace to give me his full sense of that garden into which he came.

There was something in the very air of it that exhilarated, that gave one a sense of lightness and good happening and well-being; there was something in the sight of it that made all its colour clean and perfect and subtly luminous. In the instant of coming into it one was exquisitely glad—as only in rare moments, and when one is young and joyful, one can be glad in this world. And everything was beautiful there...

Wallace mused before he went on telling me. "You see," he said, with the doubtful inflection of a man who pauses at incredible things, "there were two great panthers there . . . Yes, spotted panthers. And I was not afraid. There was a long wide path with marble-edged flower borders on either side, and these two huge velvety beasts were playing there with a ball. One looked up and came towards me, a little curious as it seemed. It came right up to me, rubbed its soft round ear very gently against the small hand I held out, and purred. It was, I tell you, an enchanted garden. I know. And the size? Oh! it stretched far and wide, this way and that. I believe there were hills far away. Heaven knows where West Kensington had suddenly got to. And somehow it was just like coming home:

"You know, in the very moment the door swung to behind me, I forgot the road with its fallen chestnut leaves, its cabs and tradesmen's carts, I forgot the sort of gravitational pull back to the discipline and obedience of home, I forgot all hesitations and fear, forgot discretion, forgot all the intimate realities of this life. I became in a moment a very glad and wonder-happy little boy—in another

world. It was a world with a different quality, a warmer, more penetrating and mellower light, with a faint clear gladness in its air, and wisps of sun-touched cloud in the blueness of its sky. And before me ran this long wide path, invitingly, with weedless beds on either side, rich with untended flowers, and these two great panthers. I put my little hands fearlessly on their soft fur, and caressed their round ears and the sensitive corners under their ears, and played with them, and it was as though they welcomed me home.

"There was a keen sense of homecoming in my mind, and when presently a tall fair girl appeared in the pathway and came to meet me, smiling, and said, 'Well?' to me, and lifted me, and kissed me, and put me down, and led me by the hand, there was no amazement, but only an impression of delightful rightness, of being reminded of happy things that had in some strange way been overlooked. There were broad red steps, I remember, that came into view between spikes of delphinium, and up these we went to a great avenue between very old and shady dark trees. All down this avenue, you know, between the red chapped stems, were marble seats of honour and statuary, and very tame and friendly white doves . . .

"Along this cool avenue my girl friend led me, looking down—I recall the pleasant lines, the finely modelled chin of her sweet kind face—asking me questions in a soft, agreeable voice, and telling me things, pleasant things I know, though what they were I was never able to recall . . . Presently a little Capuchin monkey, very clean, with a fur of ruddy brown and kindly hazel eyes, came down a tree to us and ran beside me, looking up at me and grinning, and presently leaped to my shoulder. So we two went on our way in great happiness."

He paused.

"Go on," I said.

"I remember little things. We passed an old man musing among laurels, I remember, and a place gay with paroquets, and came through a broad shaded colonnade to a spacious cool palace, full of pleasant fountains, full of beautiful things, full of the quality and promise of heart's desire. And there were many things and many people, some that still seem to stand out clearly and some that are a little vague; but all these people were beautiful and kind. In some way—I don't know how—it was conveyed to me that they all were kind to me, glad to have me there, and filling me with gladness by their gestures, by the touch of their hands, by the welcome and love

in their eyes. Yes—”

He mused for a while. “Playmates I found there. That was very much to me, because I was a lonely little boy. They played delightful games in a grass-covered court where there was a sundial set about with flowers. And as one played one loved . . .

“But—it’s odd—there’s a gap in my memory. I don’t remember the games we played. I never remembered. Afterwards, as a child, I spent long hours trying, even with tears, to recall the form of that happiness. I wanted to play it all over again—in my nursery—by myself. No! All I remember is the happiness and two dear playfellows who were most with me . . . Then presently came a sombre dark woman, with a grave, pale face and dreamy eyes, a sombre woman, wearing a soft long robe of pale purple, who carried a book, and beckoned and took me aside with her into a gallery above a hall—though my playmates were loath to have me go, and ceased their game and stood watching as I was carried away. ‘Come back to us!’ they cried. ‘Come back to us soon!’

“I looked up at her face, but she heeded them not at all. Her face was very gentle and grave. She took me to a seat in the gallery, and I stood beside her, ready to look at her book as she opened it upon her knee. The pages fell open. She pointed, and I looked, marvelling, for in the living pages of that book I saw myself; it was a story about myself, and in it were all the things that had happened to me since ever I was born . . .

“It was wonderful to me, because the pages of that book were not pictures, you understand, but realities.”

Wallace paused gravely—looked at me doubtfully.

“Go on,” I said. “I understand.”

“They were realities—yes, they must have been; people moved and things came and went in them; my dear mother, whom I had near forgotten; then my father, stern and upright, the servants, the nursery, all the familiar things of home. Then the front door and the busy streets, with traffic to and fro. I looked and marvelled, and looked half doubtfully again into the woman’s face and turned the pages over, skipping this and that, to see more of this book and more, and so at last I came to myself hovering and hesitating outside the green door in the long white wall, and felt again the conflict and the fear.

“‘And next?’ I cried, and would have turned on, but the cool hand of the grave woman delayed me.

“‘Next?’ I insisted, and struggled gently with her hand, pulling

up her fingers with all my childish strength, and as she yielded and the page came over she bent down upon me like a shadow and kissed my brow.

"But the page did not show the enchanted garden, nor the panthers, nor the girl who had led me by the hand, nor the playfellows who had been so loath to let me go. It showed a long gray street in West Kensington, in that chill hour of afternoon before the lamps are lit, and I was there, a wretched little figure, weeping aloud, for all that I could do to restrain myself, and I was weeping because I could not return to my dear playfellows who had called after me, 'Come back to us! Come back to us soon!' I was there. This was no page in a book, but harsh reality; that enchanted place and the restraining hand of the grave mother at whose knee I stood had gone—whither had they gone?"

He halted again, and remained for a time staring into the fire.

"Oh! the woefulness of that return!" he murmured.

"Well?" I said, after a minute or so.

"Poor little wretch I was!—brought back to this gray world again! As I realised the fullness of what had happened to me, I gave way to quite ungovernable grief. And the shame and humiliation of that public weeping and my disgraceful homecoming remain with me still. I see again the benevolent-looking old gentleman in gold spectacles who stopped and spoke to me—prodding me first with his umbrella. 'Poor little chap,' said he; 'and are you lost then?'—and me a London boy of five and more! And he must needs bring in a kindly young policeman and make a crowd of me, and so march me home.

"Sobbing, conspicuous, and frightened, I came back from the enchanted garden to the steps of my father's house.

"That is as well as I can remember my vision of that garden—the garden that haunts me still. Of course, I can convey nothing of that indescribable quality of translucent unreality, that *difference* from the common things of experience that hung about it 'all; but that—that is what happened. If it was a dream, I am sure it was a daytime and altogether extraordinary dream... H'm!—naturally there followed a terrible questioning, by my aunt, my father, the nurse, the governess—everyone...

"I tried to tell them, and my father gave me my first thrashing for telling lies. When afterwards I tried to tell my aunt, she punished me again for my wicked persistence. Then, as I said, everyone was forbidden to listen to me, ~~to hear a word about~~ it. Even my fairy-

tale books were taken away from me for a time—because I was too 'imaginative.' Eh? Yes, they did that! My father belonged to the old school . . . And my story was driven back upon myself.

"I whispered it to my pillow—my pillow that was often damp and salt to my whispering lips with childish tears. And I added always to my official and less fervent prayers this one heartfelt request: 'Please God I may dream of the garden. Oh! take me back to my garden!' Take me back to my garden! I dreamed often of the garden. I may have added to it, I may have changed it; I do not know . . . All this, you understand, is an attempt to reconstruct from fragmentary memories a very early experience. Between that and the other consecutive memories of my boyhood there is a gulf. A time came when it seemed impossible I should ever speak of that wonder glimpse again."

I asked an obvious question.

"No," he said. "I don't remember that I ever attempted to find my way back to the garden in those early years. This seems odd to me now, but I think that very probably a closer watch was kept on my movements after this misadventure to prevent my going astray. No, it wasn't till you knew me that I tried for the garden again. And I believe there was a period—incredible as it seems now—when I forgot the garden altogether—when I was about eight or nine it may have been. Do you remember me as a kid at Saint *Æthelstan's*?"

"Rather!"

"I didn't show any signs, did I, in those days of having a secret dream?"

He looked up with a sudden smile.

"Did you ever play Northwest Passage with me? . . . No, of course you didn't come my way!"

"It was the sort of game," he went on, "that every imaginative child plays all day. The idea was the discovery of a Northwest Passage to school. The way to school was plain enough; the game consisted in finding some way that wasn't plain, starting off ten minutes early in some almost hopeless direction, and working my way round through unaccustomed streets to my goal. And one day I got entangled among some rather low-class streets on the other side of Camden Hill, and I began to think that for once the game would be against me and that I should get to school late. I tried rather desperately a street that seemed a *cul-de-sac*, and found a passage at the end. I hurried through that with renewed hope. 'I shall do it

yet,' I said, and passed a row of frowsy little shops that were inexplicably familiar to me, and behold!! there was my long white wall and the green door that led to the enchanted garden!

"The thing whacked upon me suddenly. Then, after all, that garden, that wonderful garden, wasn't a dream!"

He paused.

"I suppose my second experience with the green door marks the world of difference there is between the busy life of a schoolboy and the infinite leisure of a child. Anyhow, this second time I didn't for a moment think of going in straightaway. You see— For one thing, my mind was full of the idea of getting to school in time—set on not breaking my record for punctuality. I must surely have felt *some* little desire at least to try the door—yes. I must have felt that . . . But I seem to remember the attraction of the door mainly as another obstacle to my overmastering determination to get to school.

"I was immensely interested by this discovery I had made, of course—I went on with my mind full of it—but I went on. It didn't check me. I ran past, tugging out my watch, found I had ten minutes still to spare, and then I was going downhill into familiar surroundings. I got to school, breathless, it is true, and wet with perspiration, but in time. I can remember hanging up my coat and hat . . . Went right by it and left it behind me. Odd, eh?"

He looked at me thoughtfully. "Of course I didn't know then that it wouldn't always be there. Schoolboys have limited imaginations. I suppose I thought it was an awfully jolly thing to have it there, to know my way back to it, but there was the school tugging at me. I expect I was a good deal distraught and inattentive that morning, recalling what I could of the beautiful strange people I should presently see again. Oddly enough I had no doubt in my mind that they would be glad to see me. . . . Yes, I must have thought of the garden that morning just as a jolly sort of place to which one might resort in the interludes of a strenuous scholastic career.

"I didn't go that day at all. The next day was a half holiday, and that may have weighed with me. Perhaps, too, my state of inattention brought down impositions upon me, and docked the margin of time necessary for the detour. I don't know. What I do know is that in the meantime the enchanted garden was so much upon my mind that I could not keep it to myself.

"I told. What was his name?—a ferrety-looking youngster we used to call Squiff."

"Young Hopkins," said I.

"Hopkins it was. I did not like telling him. I had a feeling that in some way it was against the rules to tell him, but I did. He was walking part of the way home with me; he was talkative, and if we had not talked about the enchanted garden we should have talked of something else, and it was intolerable to me to think about any other subject. So I blabbed.

"Well, he told my secret. The next day in the play interval I found myself surrounded by half a dozen bigger boys, half teasing, and wholly curious to hear more of the enchanted garden. There was that big Fawcett—you remember him?—and Carnaby and Morley Reynolds. You weren't there by any chance? No, I think I should have remembered if you were . . .

"A boy is a creature of odd feelings. I was, I really believe, in spite of my secret self-disgust, a little flattered to have the attention of these big fellows. I remember particularly a moment of pleasure caused by the praise of Crawshaw—you remember Crawshaw major, the son of Crawshaw the composer?—who said it was the best lie he had ever heard. But at the same time there was a really painful undertow of shame at telling what I felt was indeed a sacred secret. That beast Fawcett made a joke about the girl in green—"

Wallace's voice sank with the keen memory of that shame. "I pretended not to hear," he said. "Well, then Carnaby suddenly called me a young liar, and disputed with me when I said the thing was true. I said I knew where to find the green door, could lead them all there in ten minutes. Carnaby became outrageously virtuous, and said I'd have to—and bear out my words or suffer. Did you ever have Carnaby twist your arm? Then perhaps you'll understand how it went with me. I swore my story was true. There was nobody in the school then to save a chap from Carnaby, though Crawshaw put in a word or so. Carnaby had got his game. I grew excited and red-eared, and a little frightened. I behaved altogether like a silly little chap, and the outcome of it all was that instead of starting alone for my enchanted garden, I led the way presently—cheeks flushed, ears hot, eyes smarting, and my soul one burning misery and shame—for a party of six mocking, curious, and threatening school-fellows.

"We never found the white wall and the green door . . ."

"You mean—?"

"I mean I couldn't find it. I would have found it if I could.

"And afterwards when I could go alone I couldn't find it. I never found it. I seem now to have been always looking for it through my

schoolboy days, but I never came upon it—never."

"Did the fellows—make it disagreeable?"

"Beastly . . . Carnaby held a council over me for wanton lying. I remember how I sneaked home and upstairs to hide the marks of my blubbering. But when I cried myself to sleep at last it wasn't for Carnaby, but for the garden, for the beautiful afternoon I had hoped for, for the sweet friendly women and the waiting playfellows, and the game I had hoped to learn again, that beautiful forgotten game . . .

"I believed firmly that if I had not told— . . . I had bad times after that—crying at night and wool-gathering by day. For two terms I slackened and had bad reports. Do you remember? Of course you would! It was *you*—your beating me in mathematics that brought me back to the grind again."

For a time my friend stared silently into the red heart of the fire. Then he said, "I never saw it again until I was seventeen."

"It leaped upon me for the third time—as I was driving to Paddington on my way to Oxford and a scholarship. I had just one momentary glimpse. I was leaning over the apron of my hansom smoking a cigarette, and no doubt thinking myself no end of a man of the world, and suddenly there was the door, the wall, the dear sense of unforgettable and still attainable things.

"We clattered by—I too taken by surprise to stop my cab until we were well past and round a corner. Then I had a queer moment, a double and divergent movement of my will: I tapped the little door in the roof of the cab, and brought my arm down to pull out my watch. 'Yes, sir!' said the cabman, smartly. 'Er—well—it's nothing,' I cried. 'My mistake! We haven't much time! Go on!' And he went on . . .

"I got my scholarship. And the night after I was told of that I sat over my fire in my little upper room, my study, in my father's house, with his praise—his rare praise—and his sound counsels ringing in my ears, and I smoked my favourite pipe—the formidable bulldog of adolescence—and thought of that door in the long white wall. 'If I had stopped,' I thought, 'I should have missed my scholarship, I should have missed Oxford—muddled all the fine career before me! I begin to see things better!' I fell musing deeply, but I did not doubt then this career of mine was a thing that merited sacrifice.

"Those dear friends and that clear atmosphere seemed very sweet to me, very fine but remote. My grip was fixing now upon the world.

I saw another door opening—the door of my career."

He stared again into the fire. Its red light picked out a stubborn strength in his face for just one flickering moment, and then it vanished again.

"Well," he said, and sighed, "I have served that career. I have done—much work, much hard work. But I have dreamed of the enchanted garden a thousand dreams, and seen its door, or at least glimpsed its door, four times since then. Yes—four times. For a while this world was so bright and interesting, seemed so full of meaning and opportunity, that the half-effaced charm of the garden was by comparison gentle and remote. Who wants to pat panthers on the way to dinner with pretty women and distinguished men? I came down to London from Oxford, a man of bold promise that I have done something to redeem. Something—and yet there have been disappointments . . .

"Twice I have been in love—I will not dwell on that—but once, as I went to someone who, I knew, doubted whether I dared to come, I took a short cut at a venture through an unfrequented road near Earl's Court, and so happened on a white wall and a familiar green door. 'Odd!' said I to myself, 'but I thought this place was on Campden Hill. It's the place I never could find somehow—like counting Stonehenge—the place of that queer daydream of mine.' And I went by it intent upon my purpose. It had no appeal to me that afternoon.

"I had just a moment's impulse to try the door, three steps aside were needed at the most—though I was sure enough in my heart that it would open to me—and then I thought that doing so might delay me on the way to that appointment in which I thought my honour was involved. Afterwards I was sorry for my punctuality—I might at least have peeped in, I thought, and waved a hand to those panthers, but I knew enough by this time not to seek again belatedly that which is not found by seeking. Yes, that time made me very sorry . . .

"Years of hard work after that, and never a sight of the door. It's only recently it has come back to me. With it there has come a sense as though some thin tarnish had spread itself over my world. I began to think of it as a sorrowful and bitter thing that I should never see that door again. Perhaps I was suffering a little from overwork—perhaps it was what I've heard spoken of as the feeling of forty. I don't know. But certainly the keen brightness that makes effort easy has gone out of things recently, and that just at a time—with all these new political developments when I ought to be working.

Odd, isn't it? But I do begin to find life toilsome, its rewards, as I come near them, cheap. I began a little while ago to want the garden quite badly. Yes—and I've seen it three times."

"The garden?"

"No—the door! And I haven't gone in!"

He leaned over the table to me, with an enormous sorrow in his voice as he spoke. "Thrice I have had my chance—*thrice!* If ever that door offers itself to me again, I swore, I will go in, out of this dust and heat, out of this dry glitter of vanity, out of these toilsome futilities. I will go and never return. This time I will stay. . . . I swore it, and when the time came—I *didn't go*."

"Three times in one year have I passed the door and failed to enter. Three times in the last year."

"The first time was on the night of the snatch division of the Tenants' Redemption Bill, on which the Government was saved by a majority of three. You remember? No one on our side—perhaps very few on the opposite side—expected the end that night. Then the debate collapsed like eggshells. I and Hotchkiss were dining with his cousin at Brentford; we were both unpaired, and we were called up by telephone, and set off at once in his cousin's motor. We got in barely in time, and on the way we passed my wall and door—livid in the moonlight, blotched with hot yellow as the glare of our lamps lit it, but unmistakable. 'My God!' cried I. 'What?' said Hotchkiss. 'Nothing!' I answered, and the moment passed.

"I've made a great sacrifice," I told the whip as I got in. "They all have," he said, and hurried by.

"I do not see how I could have done otherwise then. And the next occasion was as I rushed to my father's bedside to bid that stern old man farewell. Then, too, the claims of life were imperative. But the third time was different; it happened a week ago. It fills me with hot remorse to recall it. I was with Gurker and Ralphs—it's no secret now, you know, that I've had my talk with Gurker. We had been dining at Frobisher's, and the talk had become intimate between us. The question of my place in the reconstructed Ministry lay always just over the boundary of the discussion. Yes—yes. That's all settled. It needn't be talked about yet, but there's no reason to keep a secret from you . . . Yes—thanks, thanks! But let me tell you my story.

"Then, on that night things were very much in the air. My position was a very delicate one. I was keenly anxious to get some definite word from Gurker, but was hampered by Ralphs's presence. I was

using the best power of my brain to keep that light and careless talk not too obviously directed to the point that concerned me. I had to. Ralphs's behaviour since has more than justified my caution . . . Ralphs, I knew, would leave us beyond the Kensington High Street, and then I could surprise Gurker by a sudden frankness . . . And then it was that in the margin of my field of vision I became aware once more of the white wall, the green door before us down the road.

"We passed it talking. I passed it. I can still see the shadow of Gurker's marked profile, his opera hat tilted forward over his prominent nose, the many folds of his neck wrap going before my shadow and Ralphs's as we sauntered past.

"I passed within twenty inches of the door. 'If I say good night to them, and go in,' I asked myself, 'what will happen?' And I was all a-tingle for that word with Gurker.

"I could not answer that question in the tangle of my other problems. 'They will think me mad,' I thought. 'And suppose I vanish now!—Amazing disappearance of a prominent politician!' That weighed with me. A thousand inconceivably petty worldlinesses weighed with me in that crisis."

Then he turned on me with a sorrowful smile, and, speaking slowly, "Here I am!" he said.

"Here I am," he repeated, "and my chance has gone from me. Three times in one year the door has been offered me—the door that goes into peace, into delight, into a beauty beyond dreaming, a kindness no man on earth can know. And I have rejected it, Redmond, and it has gone—"

"How do you know?"

"I know. I know. I am left now to work it out, to stick to the tasks that held me so strongly when my moments came. You say I have success—this vulgar, tawdry, irksome, envied thing. I have it." He had a walnut in his big hand. "If that was my success," he said, and crushed it, and held it out for me to see.

"Let me tell you something, Redmond. This loss is destroying me. For two months, for ten weeks nearly now, I have done no work at all, except the most necessary and urgent duties. My soul is full of inappeasable regrets.

"At nights—when it is less likely I shall be recognised—I go out. I wander. Yes. I wonder what people would think of that if they knew. A Cabinet Minister, the responsible head of that most vital of all departments, ~~wandering alone~~ ^{ENGRIEVING}—sometimes near

audibly lamenting—for a door, for a garden!"

I can see now his rather pallid face, and the unfamiliar sombre fire that had come into his eyes. I see him very vividly tonight. I sit recalling his words, his tones, and last evening's *Westminster Gazette* still lies on my sofa, containing the notice of his death. At lunch today the club was busy with his death. We talked of nothing else.

They found his body very early yesterday morning in a deep excavation near East Kensington Station. It is one of two shafts that have been made in connection with an extension of the railway southward. It is protected from the intrusion of the public by a hoarding upon the high road, in which a small doorway has been cut for the convenience of some of the workmen who live in that direction. The doorway was left unfastened through a misunderstanding between two gangers, and through it he made his way . . .

My mind is darkened with questions and riddles.

It would seem he walked all the way from the House that night—he has frequently walked home during the past Session—and so it is I figure his dark form coming along the late and empty streets, wrapped up, intent. And then did the pale electric lights near the station cheat the rough planking into a semblance of white? Did that fatal unfastened door awaken some memory?

Was there, after all, ever any green door in the wall at all?

I do not know. I have told his story as he told it to me. There are times when I believe that Wallace was no more than the victim of the coincidence between a rare but not unprecedented type of hallucination and a careless trap, but that indeed is not my profoundest belief. You may think me superstitious, if you will, and foolish; but, indeed, I am more than half convinced that he had, in truth, an abnormal gift, and a sense, something—I know not what—that in the guise of wall and door offered him an outlet, a secret and peculiar passage of escape into another and altogether more beautiful world. At any rate, you will say, it betrayed him in the end. But did it betray him? There you touch the inmost mystery of these dreamers, these men of vision and the imagination. We see our world fair and common, the hoarding and the pit. By our daylight standard he walked out of security into darkness, danger, and death.

But did he see like that?

Edward D. Hoch

The Spy at the Crime Writers Congress

This detective adventure of Rand, the Double-C man, head of the Department of Concealed Communications, had its origin—more accurately, its inspiration—in the first Crime Writers International Congress, held in London, October 5-8, 1975. No less than 246 mystery writers attended this first international convention of crime-detective-and-suspense authors—96 from the United Kingdom, 108 from the United States, and delegates from Canada, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, France, The Netherlands, Italy, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, and Poland.

Now, suppose Rand had attended the conference as one of its Guest Speakers, and suppose . . .

Spy-Detective: JEFFERY RAND

They'd held the retirement party for Jeffery Rand on the previous Friday night, but he was still around the office four days later, clearing out a decade's accumulation of trifles and trinkets from his desk at Double-C. Though he was not yet 50, a number of factors had converged in recent months to convince him that retirement from British Intelligence was the proper course for him to follow.

For one thing, there was his forthcoming marriage to Leila Gaad, who'd shared his adventures in Egypt before moving to England to be near him. The wedding date was only a month away, and Leila deserved a husband who wouldn't be up half of the night trying to crack an intercepted cipher, or worse yet, programming a computer to crack it.

Then, too, there'd been the death of Taz. His Russian archrival had come out of retirement to handle one more Kremlin assignment—only to meet a grisly death on a street in Switzerland. Rand didn't want to end up that way.

So he was going off with Leila and leaving the Department of Concealed Communications in the hands of Parkinson and the others—men more skilled than himself in the new technology of code-breaking. Only one assignment remained for that afternoon, something wished on him by Hastings in the month prior to his retirement.

"You're retiring, Rand. You're the perfect one for it," Hastings had insisted.

Rand was dubious. "Talk to a roomful of crime writers about ciphers?"

"That's what they want. They're having an International Congress for three days at the Piccadilly Hotel, and they asked to hear a talk on codes and ciphers. They've already lined up Scotland Yard men, locksmiths, crime reporters, and firearms experts, in addition to a good many authors."

"I'm no speaker," Rand insisted.

"That's no problem. Your segment of the program will be chaired by Chancy O'Higgins, the mystery writer and television host. If you should falter he'll get you going with the proper questions."

Along with most other Britons, Rand had watched O'Higgins on Weekend television, seated with an hourglass and a flickering candle while he spun ghost stories, interviewed witches, and created an eerie atmosphere that was uniquely his own. The prospect of sharing the program with O'Higgins persuaded Rand to accept.

And so on this Tuesday afternoon in early October, Rand journeyed up to the Piccadilly Hotel. He remembered with some amusement Leila's comment when he'd told her about it. "A good thing! You'll meet some publishers and they'll ask you to do a book about your experiences. We must live on something after you retire."

Oddly enough, the first person he met in the hotel lobby turned out to be a publisher. Rand approached him when he saw the silver sheriff's badge that identified him as a member of the Organizing Committee. "Pardon me, are you with the Crime Writers?"

"I certainly am. Don't have my name tag on, but I'm George Bellows. I do some writing, but mainly I'm with Bellows Brothers, the publisher."

"Jeffery Rand. I'm one of the afternoon's speakers."

"Rand of Double-C! Of course we've all heard of you. Anxious to hear your talk. Come along—this way." He led Rand to the elevator, pausing on the way to introduce him to Edgar Wallace's daughter, Penelope Wallace, the Congress Director. "She's done a fine job,"

Bellows said when they had squeezed in among the others on the elevator. "And so has Jean Bowden, our Chairman. Jean was out to Heathrow Saturday morning to meet the American delegation. The opening sessions have gone very well."

"Are many here from America?"

"Over a hundred. They're the ones with white name tags. The British and Canadians have red tags, the Scandinavians yellow—you'll see a great many of those—and the other Europeans are blue."

Rand turned to a white-haired woman crowded into his corner of the elevator. "You must be American," he said, glancing at her name tag. The name on it was Gretta Frazer.

"That I am, from Chicago and Washington. I write paperback Gothics. It may not be literature, but it's fun and it pays the bills." The elevator jolted to a stop and they found themselves deposited in a reception area adjoining the conference rooms. A bar ran along one wall and many of the delegates had a drink in hand. "I hope we can chat more later," Gretta Frazer said before she was swept away by a couple of friends.

"That's Pat McGerr," Bellows said, "another writer from Washington. And the fellow with the black beard is H. R. F. Keating. Perhaps you've read some of his books."

Bellows steered him expertly through the crowd, aiming toward a large familiar figure who was the center of attention near the bar. He recognized Chancy O'Higgins at once from his weekly appearances on the television screen. He was not quite so fat as he appeared on camera, but he'd still be hard to miss. His sandy hair flew off in all directions like some latter-day Dylan Thomas, and his jacket didn't quite come together across his bulging abdomen.

"Rand!" he thundered in his familiar television voice. "I was just telling Michael Gilbert I hope we can start the session promptly at two. The publishers sponsored a cruise on the Thames this morning and people are just getting back from it. But I think we'll have enough to begin. Anyway, it's good to meet you. I think we'll have a lively session."

Rand followed him into a large meeting room, past rows of chairs to the speaker's table. Already placed on it were the twin props from the O'Higgins television show, the hourglass and the candle. The bulky author eyed his watch until the hands showed exactly two o'clock, then he upturned the hourglass so that the sand would start its descent. "Come on, everyone!" he boomed out. "Take your seats, please."

He lit the candle, as he did at the beginning of each TV show, and opened with a glowing recitation of Rand's accomplishments during his years with Double-C. Rand saw the American woman, Gretta Frazer, slip in and take a seat next to Penelope Wallace. George Bellows was down front in the first row.

O'Higgins concluded his opening by turning to Rand. "Now then, Mr. Rand, what can you tell an assembly of crime writers about codes and ciphers that we don't already know?"

Rand stood up, gazing out at the sea of expectant faces. "Thank you for your kind introduction, Mr. O'Higgins. It's indeed a pleasure to meet you and the other crime writers assembled here from all over the world. Your work, of course, is what keeps people interested in my work. In truth, communications today between governments or agents of a government are more likely to be concealed by electronic technology than by the traditional book codes or Vigenere ciphers. I want to go into some of these things in detail—though naturally I won't be telling you anything that hasn't already been hinted at in the public press."

He paused for a sip of water, then continued. "Sometimes communications are concealed merely by the geography of the situation. For example, staff cars and limousines in the Moscow area have long communicated with the Kremlin and each other by radiotelephone. The Americans had a secret spy satellite with an antenna system so highly sophisticated it could listen in on those conversations as the satellite passed slowly over Moscow."

He went on like this a bit longer, then switched to an account of his own experiences, ending with the story of Taz's recent death in Switzerland. A few in the audience headed for the doors then, but most remained for a brief question-and-answer period.

Finally, as the last of the sand trickled through the hourglass, Chancy O'Higgins rose to end the session. Rand glanced at his watch and saw that it was exactly three o'clock. "Accurate hourglass you have there."

O'Higgins smiled. "It has to be, for television."

He bent to blow out the candle as the audience streamed toward the doors. At that instant, as if by some bizarre cause-and-effect relationship, a muffled boom shook the building.

George Bellows came instantly alert. "That was a bomb—in the hotel!"

"Damned I.R.A.!" someone else muttered. The bombings of London hotels and restaurants apparently the work of an Irish Republican

Army splinter group, had grown to epidemic proportions that autumn. Barely a week passed without some new outrage and a new list of casualties.

Bellows and some others ran to the stairs, and Rand was left standing with O'Higgins and Gretta Frazer. "It was a fine, interesting talk," she complimented him. "This is my first meeting with a real spy."

"I'm hardly that," Rand protested.

They were still chatting and moving toward the door when George Bellows returned. "Terrible thing!" he told O'Higgins. "It was a bomb, all right, and it killed Tom Wager."

O'Higgins was shocked. "Not Tom!" He turned to Rand. "Did you know him? He was a journalist who turned to writing spy thrillers."

"Afraid I don't read much in the field. But where did the bomb go off?"

"Down in the lobby. Couple of other people were injured. I suppose Tom was on his way up here when it happened."

"I'd better go right down," O'Higgins said. They started for the stairs and Rand trailed along, though he noticed the American woman stayed behind. Perhaps she was squeamish.

When they reached the lobby it was a scene of turmoil. Firemen, police, and Scotland Yard men mingled with doctors and ambulance attendants. The blast seemed to have gone off near the center of the small lobby, leaving a large scorched spot in the carpeting. Every window and glass partition in sight was shattered.

Rand sidestepped a uniformed bobby trying to clear the lobby and found his old friend Inspector Stephens standing with two bomb-squad experts. "Hello, Rand. What are you doing here?"

"Speaking to the Crime Writers International Congress. I'd just finished when we heard the blast."

"It was one of their chaps who got killed. Fellow named Wager."

"More Irish terrorists?"

Inspector Stephens hesitated. "Probably. Who else sets off bombs in hotel lobbies these days?"

"But you're not sure?"

"Too soon to tell."

Rand could sense that something was wrong. "What's the rub?"

"Bomb wasn't planted in the lobby. It was in the briefcase Wager was carrying."

"You think he was bringing it in to plant it?"

"Doubtful. He must have known all the hotels run spot searches

these days. More likely it was planted without his knowledge."

"That makes it premeditated murder," Rand said.

"It's a possibility," Stephens admitted.

Rand had expected to leave the hotel at once, letting Scotland Yard deal with the bombing, but that was not to be. George Bellows caught him at the door and urged him back. "You can do us a great service, Mr. Rand, if you'll talk to Tom Wager's widow."

"That's a bit out of my line. Perhaps a clergyman—"

"She heard you speak upstairs. She won't talk to anyone else."

A bit puzzled, Rand followed the publisher to a room just off the lobby. A tall slim woman, a bit younger than he'd expected, awaited him with dry eyes. "You're Mr. Rand. I'm Joyce Wager, Tom's wife."

"A terrible thing about your husband," he said, taking her hand.

"Tom was fated to die violently. He often said so himself. I've no tears to shed for him."

Rand made no comment.

"But that doesn't mean I intend to let his killer go unpunished. He was a good man, for all his faults."

"I don't see how I fit in," Rand said. "I'm not with the police, and I've just retired from British Intelligence."

"Tom's new book is a factual one—about a writer who worked with the Germans during the war, writing propaganda for them while serving as a correspondent in Switzerland. The truth about the man never came out after the war, and he's had a successful writing career since that time."

"The man's name?"

"Tom's manuscript, to be published next month, only identifies him by the code name of Lucky."

"He never told you who Lucky was?"

She shook her head. "That's what I want you to find out. I think Tom was killed by this man Lucky. Tom told me he met someone for lunch while I was on the boat ride this morning, and that he was meeting him again in the lobby at five minutes after three."

"Who's publishing the book?" Rand asked, glancing at Bellows.

"Not me, old chap. Red Lion is his publisher."

"Will you help?" Joyce Wager asked Rand.

"I'll ask a few questions. I can't do more than that."

Inspector Stephens entered the room and indicated that Mrs. Wager was needed. When she'd left, Rand said, "The woman's composure astounds me. Her husband hasn't been dead a half hour."

"They were not terribly close," the publisher admitted.

Wager's body had been removed and a crew was busy cleaning up the lobby. Rand and Bellows crossed to the hotel lounge with its shattered windows and found a number of the delegates talking in hushed tones about the tragedy. He was getting quite skilled at reading name tags now, and he identified Michael Gilbert standing with Nigel Morland and Josephine Bell. A number of American writers, including Robert L. Fish and Stanley Ellin, were seated at a table close to the door. Hillary Waugh and Franklin Bandy stood nearby, looking serious.

Chancy O'Higgins was holding court at a round center table, his booming voice only slightly softened by the tragedy. He motioned Rand to join them and said, "I've often thought crime writers would make the perfect murderers. What do you say, Rand?"

"Do you think one of the crime writers killed Tom Wager?"

"It's a possibility, isn't it? Just as likely as the I.R.A., heaven knows!"

"You're only saying that because you're Irish," the American woman, Gretta Frazer, said.

"I'm a Scotsman and there's quite a difference," O'Higgins corrected her with a smile. "But really, wouldn't we make the perfect murderers?"

George Bellows joined them with a drink from the bar. "We'd be forever killing our victims with icicles in locked rooms."

After another round of drinks and some comments by Christianna Brand and Desmond Bagley, Rand excused himself and went outside for a taxi. As he glanced in both directions, a familiar black limousine glided to the curb. "This is an honor," Rand said, climbing into the back seat with Hastings.

"Part of the service for retired personnel. How was your talk?"

"Seemed well-received. Until the bombing, that is."

"Ah, yes. Poor Tom Wager."

Rand smiled. "I gather you have an interest in him."

"We have an interest in a book he's written."

"You know about that?"

"It's no secret. His publisher issued a press release a month ago. We asked to see galley proofs as a matter of routine."

"What do you think?"

Hastings shrugged. "It reads like fiction but it could be fact. If so, it could be dangerous for someone trying to live down his past. The bombing just doesn't feel like an I.R.A. job."

"I'm retired, remember? Where do I fit in?"

Hastings snorted. "You'll never really retire, Rand. This business is in your blood."

"All right, what do you want?"

"If this Lucky—the fellow in the book—did kill him, it was because he feared Wager would start naming names. I want you to go back to tomorrow's sessions and see what you can find out."

The limousine passed Rand's apartment and circled the block. "I can do that," Rand admitted. "But I might not find Lucky. He might be pure fiction, or he might have been Wager himself. Did anyone ever call him Lucky Wager?"

"Not that I know of. But he *was* in Switzerland during the war."

"There's no doubt the dead man is really Wager?"

"His wife identified him."

"Could she have killed him for his book royalties?"

"That's highly unlikely as a murder motive. He'd only received a small advance from his publisher."

This time around the block Rand signaled the driver to stop. "All right," he said, getting out. "I'll be in touch."

Rand took the elevator to his apartment and unlocked the door. It was nearly dark, and only the last of the twilight filtered through his mesh curtains. But when he saw the curtains closed he knew he had a visitor. "Leila?" he called.

A light by the sofa snapped on, and then he saw her.

It was Gretta Frazer and she was pointing a gun at him.

"Sit down," she said, lowering the weapon. "I won't shoot you."

"Getting in the mood for one of your Gothics?" he asked the American woman.

"Not exactly."

"I thought I left you back at the hotel."

"You did. You must have taken the long way home."

"I was chatting with a friend. What's the gun for?"

"I didn't know how you might react to finding me here. I'm a bit old for a housebreaker."

"What are you, usually?"

The white-haired woman opened the purse and tossed him her wallet. "Inside pocket, under the calendar."

He found an ID card and recognized it at once. "National Security Agency in Washington. I'd like to read one of your Gothics someday."

"The novels are a sideline. I've worked in N.S.A.'s Communications Section for the past twenty years."

"Then my talk this afternoon was nothing new to you."

"I've heard it all before, if not in so public a forum. The information about our spy satellites was especially distressing."

"It's all been in print."

"Nevertheless, we don't like that sort of information turning up in every other spy novel."

Rand smiled. "I understand N.S.A. is even more computerized than we are. Is it true you have a machine programmed to read every cablegram sent to or from the country, and to print out any messages containing key words like 'oil' or 'Mideast' or 'Russia'?"

"We have something like that," she conceded. "I'll give you a tour next time you're in Washington."

"What do you want of me now?"

"I came to talk about Tom Wager's death."

"It seems to be a popular subject today."

"His book is popular at N.S.A. I drew the assignment of coming here because my writing gives me a perfect cover at an International Convention like this. My mission was to contact Wager and offer him money to reveal the identity of Lucky."

Rand nodded thoughtfully. "You may have supplied the motive I've been searching for. If Wager went to Lucky and demanded more money than you offered, it could have got him killed."

"We think that's what happened, and that's why I'm here. We need someone familiar with operations during the Second World War, and I understand you were in intelligence work back then."

"As a *very* young man," Rand assured her. "But I'll do what I can for you." *And for Hastings, and for Joyce Wager,* he added silently. He'd never been so much in demand when he was head of Double-C.

He just wondered how he was going to satisfy any one of them, let alone all.

Rand spent much of Wednesday morning at his old office, looking through microfilmed records of the war years. Tom Wager certainly had been a correspondent in Switzerland for a time, but there was no hint he'd committed any of the acts he had ascribed to Lucky. Working from a list of delegates to the Crime Writers International Congress, Rand attempted to pin down any sort of trail leading back to the war years.

But there was nothing.

The closest he came was a cross-indexed note on publisher George

Bellows, who'd served as a P.O.W. interrogator for Army Intelligence. There was nothing on Chancy O'Higgins. When he struck out with the other names as well, he began to wonder about different nationalities—but he decided the task was fruitless. He had no real evidence that the mysterious Lucky was a crime writer.

A little before noon he went back to the hotel.

The first person he saw in the lobby was an American novelist, Richard Martin Stern, who directed him to a downstairs meeting room where a panel discussion on mystery writing was about to begin. Stern himself was on the panel, along with Eric Ambler, Gavin Lyall, and Stanley Ellin. Rand stood near the back of the room listening to the introductory remarks offered by moderator Dick Francis, then walked over to where Gretta Frazer was standing. "Hello," she greeted him. "I understand we missed a very good demonstration by the Police Dog Squad yesterday afternoon. The dogs sniffed out hidden drugs."

"Dogs that could sniff out explosives would be more to the point."

"The police have those too."

Chancy O'Higgins appeared, along with Mrs. Wager, and Rand drifted over to catch their conversation. "I can't put you on the show to talk about spies and your husband's murder," the wild-haired writer was saying, "much as I'd like to. I tell ghost stories. The public—my public—doesn't want reality. There are enough talk shows on the BBC for that."

Joyce Wager turned to Rand for help. "Can't you convince him? I need all the help and publicity I can get to bring Tom's killer to justice."

"We're all doing the best we can," Rand assured her.

When she walked away to join a group of Swedish writers, O'Higgins muttered, "Damn woman's trying to promote his book on my show."

They listened to the rest of the discussion, and when it broke up the writers scattered about the room in small groups, chatting informally while photographers snapped pictures. Rand watched Gretta Frazer deep in conversation with Ruth Rendell and Celia Fremlin. Then, as she moved away toward the door, a uniformed bellman appeared. He was paging someone, and Gretta Frazer motioned to him. He handed her an envelope and moved on.

"... and I did line up a few people for my show," O'Higgins was saying. "C. P. Snow was here for our opening dinner Sunday night, and Kingsley Amis was on the boat ride yesterday. Both of them

have written mysteries, you know, and I thought—”

Gretta Frazer tore open the flap of the envelope.

There was a flash and roar of an explosion.

Rand leaped forward, but it was too late.

Inspector Stephens was unhappy. “Letter bomb,” he told Rand. “A favorite terrorist weapon, though fortunately one that isn’t used too often. A flat piece of plastic explosive with a detonator that went off when the envelope was opened.”

“How many injuries in all?”

“Gretta Frazer was killed almost instantly, and three people near her were taken to the hospital. A few others have minor cuts. We’re lucky there weren’t more.”

“Gretta Frazer wasn’t lucky,” Rand said. “Have you traced the letter?”

“It was left at the desk upstairs, with a note to deliver it down here after the discussion. The clerk didn’t see who left it.” Stephens shook his head. “I can’t see any reason for singling out this American woman.”

“There may have been a reason,” Rand confided. “She worked for N.S.A. in Washington. She was sent here to buy information from Tom Wager.”

“So the same killer disposed of them both?”

“Looks like it. He may not have been sure how much Wager told her before he died.”

Rand left Stephens and moved among the others, aware of the shock etched deep on their faces. Though they wrote about murder, this was the closest most of them had ever been to one. He spotted O’Higgins talking with the American writer William P. McGivern, and when they separated Rand cornered the Scotsman and asked, “Are you staying here at the hotel?”

The stout man nodded. “I live in Cambridge and each night after the TV show I enjoy a late drink with fellow writers who live more than an hour’s train journey away. I’m here till tomorrow.”

“I’d like to talk to you about these killings. Could I come up to your room?”

“Certainly, old man. Room 334. I’ll be there in half an hour.” He glanced around at the others. “The closing dinner tonight will be more like a wake, I’m afraid. And the press isn’t helping any. They seem to think mystery writers can solve crimes as well as write about them.”

Rand found Joyce Wager trying to comfort some of the dead woman's American friends. Once more he was amazed at her calm in a crisis. When she was alone he asked her, "Was your husband ever called Lucky?"

"You mean like in his book? Certainly not, Mr. Rand. Tom wasn't writing about himself."

"But he was in Switzerland at the time he described."

"So was Lucky. That was how Tom learned about him."

"Why would he wait thirty years to tell about it?"

"I have no idea." She stared at the knot of policemen clustered around the spot where Gretta Frazer had died. "Do you know who did it yet? Who killed Tom and that woman?"

"I think I do," Rand told her. "Even if I have no evidence, I can't risk waiting for another bomb and another death."

Chancy O'Higgins greeted him at the door and showed him to an overstuffed chair, adjusting the cushion as Rand sat down. His ubiquitous hourglass and candle stood on the low coffee table between them, though the candle was unlit.

O'Higgins turned over the hourglass as he sat down opposite Rand. "Have to keep track of the time. In an hour I must start dressing for tonight's dinner."

"I heard there was some talk of canceling it."

"Just talk. If the bombs are the work of the I.R.A. we can't buckle under that easily. We went through the blitz, after all, so I guess we can survive a few bombs."

"The bombs aren't the work of the I.R.A." Rand said. "They're the work of this man named Lucky, a ghost from thirty years ago."

Chancy O'Higgins frowned. "Have you discovered who he is?"

"I think it's you, O'Higgins. I think you killed Tom Wager and Gretta Frazer."

"Oh, come now!"

"His wife is certain Lucky exists."

"His wife! Have you considered the possibility that *she* killed him?"

"I'm sure she'd have put on a more grief-stricken act if she were the murderer. And she'd have had no motive for killing Gretta Frazer, who'd hardly be interested in the Wagers' marital problems. No, I'm betting on you, O'Higgins."

The stout man remained calm, tapping the tips of his fingers together. "Even if Joyce Wager didn't kill her husband, she might

have lied about the identity of the dead man. Wager could still be alive, and behind the whole thing himself."

"I considered that too, but it doesn't hold up. The bomb went off in the lobby of a hotel where scores of people who knew Wager were attending a convention. Anyone might have caught a glimpse of him just before the explosion. Anyone might have said, 'No, the dead man isn't Tom Wager.' Hardly the sort of risk a clever murderer would take. The victim had to be Wager, and it's highly unlikely his wife was involved. After all, wives can find far less risky ways to kill their husbands."

O'Higgins was still frowning. "So we're back to me as Lucky—correct?"

"Correct. You see, Wager was supposed to meet his killer in the lobby at 3:05. The meeting was necessarily in the lobby to make certain Wager didn't wander into the session where I was talking and endanger so many people—or if he did enter the session room, that he'd leave before the bomb went off. It also had to be in the lobby because you hoped the explosion would be blamed on the I.R.A. Now I asked myself, why was the time set at 3:05 instead of three o'clock? Since the killer didn't intend to keep his appointment anyway, what difference could five minutes make?"

"But if Wager knew Lucky had to be somewhere else until three, the odd timing is explained. Where did Lucky have to be? At my talk, of course. But not as a spectator, because any of them could have left early. Only one person besides myself *had* to stay until three o'clock, and that was you. To convince Wager you really meant to meet him, you had to set the time for a few minutes *after* three."

"What sort of proof is that?" O'Higgins scoffed. "If Wager was meeting me, he would have come upstairs where he knew I was."

"I'm sure you persuaded him against it. According to his wife he'd already had a luncheon meeting with Lucky—when I suppose you managed to hide the bomb in his briefcase—and the later meeting could only have been arranged so you'd pay him the money he demanded. You could easily have convinced him that the money shouldn't be passed upstairs, in view of hundreds of delegates who knew you both. You no doubt suggested meeting in the lobby and then strolling up Piccadilly."

"Anything else?"

"Oh, yes. Wager's book exposed a man he named Lucky. Your name, Chancy, is the Scottish word for Lucky, isn't it?"

Chancy O'Higgins was still smiling, but now—in a movement too

fast for Rand to follow—his right hand held a small Beretta automatic. "Keep talking, Rand. You have until the sand runs through this hourglass, and then you will die."

"Oh?"

"You are seated on the last of my little infernal machines. When I adjusted the cushion for you, I tripped the timer so it would explode in one hour. Watch the sand. It is your life draining away."

Rand shifted uneasily. He was certain the man was serious. "Do you intend to remain here until it explodes?"

"Of course. My bombs are carefully made. It will destroy you and the chair. I will shield my face and body and suffer a few minor burns at worst. Just enough to place me above suspicion."

The sand was already a quarter of the way through the glass. "Why don't you light your candle too," Rand suggested, "and really set the scene?"

O'Higgins flicked a lighter with his left hand and leaned over to touch the wick. "I'll do just that. It pleases me that you're not afraid to die."

"Forty-five minutes is a long time."

"No one will rescue you, if that's what you're thinking. I used the hour timer to give you a chance for your life. If you hadn't accused me you could have walked out of here alive without ever knowing about the bomb in the chair."

Rand reached out and pushed the candle close to the hourglass.

"Don't touch that! Another movement and I'll shoot you! The bomb will easily hide the traces of a bullet wound."

"Sorry. I just wanted a little more light on my life slipping away. While we're waiting you can tell me about Gretta Frazer. I understand that you killed Wager to silence him, but why did you kill the American woman?"

"Because Wager told me of her money offer, and I couldn't be sure I'd killed him before he talked. When she left the lounge immediately after you yesterday, I followed her to your apartment. I knew you were both after me then, and I couldn't risk leaving her alive. The letter bomb was carefully made to kill only her."

The sand was now halfway through the hourglass, and Rand imagined he could feel the outline of the bomb under his cushion. "Well—thirty minutes to live, more or less. What shall we talk about? Your years in Switzerland?"

O'Higgins sighed. "I was a young man then, too young for the assignment, I suppose. Reporting the war from a neutral country

like Switzerland was a bore at best. I fell in with some people from the German Embassy and it was the first excitement I'd had. I imagined writing a book about it later, but of course I never did. Tom Wager wrote the book."

"He waited thirty years."

"He waited until I was a successful author and television personality. Then he came to me for money. When I refused him, he threatened me with the book. My only mistake was in not killing him at once. I waited, and too many people became interested in the book—people like you and Gretta Frazer."

He fell silent for a moment, and Rand focused his eyes on the hourglass. Only a quarter of the sand remained in the upper part now. He watched the candle flame flickering next to it and asked, "But why use bombs? Why injure innocent people?"

"The Germans got me interested in explosives and bombmaking while I was writing propaganda for them. Later I kept it up, as a hobby. On weekends I'd go off to the fields outside Cambridge and set off little bombs. If I say so myself, I'm now quite an expert on the technique. I've never had a bomb that failed."

"If I die you'll never get away with it, O'Higgins. Too many people know what I'm working on."

Chancy O'Higgins shook his head. "Nobody knows. People in your line of work are secretive."

Rand's eyes were on the sand. "You can't kill me like this!"

"You're retired, Rand. Your life is over anyway."

"At forty-nine?"

"It's you or me." He raised the pistol an inch. "Don't move and don't try kicking the table."

They sat in silence, facing each other, as the last of the sand trickled away. Still holding the gun steady, the stout man rose and stepped behind his chair, shielding his lower face with his arm.

Rand watched the sand.

Just a few grains more, and then—

The sand was finished. The hour was up.

Nothing happened.

"Your bomb is a bit late," Rand remarked.

"It *couldn't* be late! The timer is foolproof!" He glanced at his watch but that did him no good, since he hadn't checked it at the beginning of the hour.

They waited another minute. Rand could feel the sweat running down his back.

Nothing happened.

"It's not going to explode," Rand said. "It's a dud."

O'Higgins motioned with his gun. "Get out of the chair and stand facing the wall! No tricks!"

Rand did as he was told and the stout man moved forward, clawing at the cushion with his left hand.

That was when the bomb went off.

Hastings found Rand in the emergency ward at the hospital, having some lacerations on his back treated by a young nurse. "Wait till Leila hears of this!"

Rand smiled through a lip he'd cut when his face hit the wall. "I hope you won't tell her. Is O'Higgins dead?"

Hastings nodded. "Dead on arrival. So he was our bomber?"

"And the mysterious Lucky. I'll tell you all about it."

"Stephens already told me you were sitting on a bomb. How'd you turn the tables?"

"He was timing it with his hourglass. When it didn't go off on schedule he had to have a look. Said he'd never had one fail. But I'd gotten him to light his damned candle, and I shoved it up right next to the glass. Among Sixteenth Century seamen it was called 'Warming the glass.' To shorten their watch they put the hourglass near a lantern or lamp. The glass expanded from the heat and the sand ran through faster. It was a flogging offense on most ships."

"So the hour wasn't really up when O'Higgins thought it was."

"Luckily for me! I didn't really know if my hourglass stunt would work, but it was the only chance I could think of."

"He should have known better than to go examining an unexploded bomb."

"He had too much pride. He couldn't believe it when it didn't explode on schedule."

"By God, Rand, you can't retire! What will we do without you?"

Rand turned over as the nurse finished dressing his wounds. "You'll get by. There'll be others a good deal better than me."

"I'm betting you'll be back within six months," Hastings said.

Rand remembered what had happened to the Russian, Taz, when he came out of retirement. That had been a bomb too, only Taz hadn't been as lucky as Rand.

"No," he told Hastings, "don't bet on it."

Victor Canning

Baskets of Apples and Roses

A typical case from the files of the Department of Patterns—which always means a strange and puzzling mystery . . . The pattern, on the surface, looked perfectly clear—but what did it mean? Yet, unfathomable as the pattern seemed, Papa Grand penetrated its truth as soon as the odd and baffling facts were fully reported to him . . .

Detectives: DEPARTMENT OF PATTERNS

The Department of Patterns is known to only a very few people in France, and the inside of its offices on the Quai d'Orsay to even fewer. Young men—and sometimes young women—are transferred to it from the security services and the police for periods of training and research. If at the end of two years you come out of it with the rating *Assez bien* from its chief, Papa Grand; you have done well—very well indeed.

Apart from training, the Department specializes in solving old cases which have been abandoned by the police, or in originating cases which arise from its own study of the patterns of crime. Most of the time you sit sifting through masses of data, official records, newspaper reports, and files, hoping that by arrangement and analysis some pattern of significance will emerge. Sometimes, however, you get a pattern handed to you on a plate.

This is what happened to me at the end of my first year in the Department. It had been a good year for me because, of all the other new members, I was the only one without a black mark, and I felt very pleased with myself.

I was called into Papa Grand's office one morning and found him with the head of the Surete's political branch, Monsieur Arbroy. Papa Grand had his feet up on his desk, his back to the little window that looked out over the Seine, and he was smoking a pipe. Papa

Grand is Monsieur Alphonse Grand. He could be tough and he could be jovial—a big, fleshy, white-haired man of about 60 with bright blue eyes and a strong Norman accent still distinguishable in his voice.

Papa Grand introduced me to Monsieur Arbroy, then passed a file across to me and said, "My dear Mascaux, the Surete's political branch is snowed under at the moment with all this O.A.S. stuff and the Algerian trouble, so as our brightest first-year student, consider yourself attached to them until further notice. I want your comments on the contents of that file in twenty-four hours."

He paused, then rubbed the bowl of his pipe against his nose, smiled slyly and said, "I'm not sure about this, but I think I'm right in giving this assignment to you because of all my young men I think you are the least politically minded."

I saw Monsieur Arbroy give a little frown, make a move as though to say something, and then change his mind. And I knew why he had changed his mind. He had once been in the Department and he knew Papa Grand. And I must say, something in Papa Grand's manner made me momentarily uneasy.

I took the file back to my room and went through it. It consisted of police reports on a series of bomb outrages which had occurred over the last twelve months. There had been four of them, all in Paris.

The first had occurred the previous January. An ornamental basketful of roses and apples had been delivered to the house of a Paris editor at six o'clock in the evening. About three o'clock that night an explosion had occurred in the basket which had been left on the sideboard in the dining room, and the editor's house had been almost gutted by the subsequent fire. No lives had been lost. The bomb had been established as a phosphorus incendiary bomb, and it was thought that it had been in the form of an artificial apple.

A card with the gift had indicated that it had come from a personal friend of the editor. This friend, it developed, had denied sending the gift, and the maid who had received it had said that it had been delivered by an elderly man, shabbily dressed, but who spoke with a good accent.

In March a similar basket of flowers and fruit had been delivered to a topflight journalist on another Paris paper, and during the night his house had been badly damaged by the same kind of explosion and fire. In his case there had also been a card from a friend, and once again the same shabbily dressed man had delivered it.

In June another journalist on another Paris paper had been similarly treated.

And in August the editor of still another Paris paper had received the same kind of destructive gift—always roses and apples with the phosphorus bomb concealed in the basket. Surete inquiries had established without doubt that the signatures on all four cards with the baskets had been forged.

There it was—a consistent pattern of roses and apples and incendiary bombs, and always the victim had been a newspaperman. So far, happily, there had been no loss of life, but there had been a great deal of damage.

I went to work on it, checking the existing police detail, interviewing the victims, and spending some time reading back copies of the newspapers involved. I knew perfectly well that, although Papa Grand had handed this to me as a straight assignment, he had also given it to me as a test. I'd done well in the Department so far. Papa Grand would know that I was pleased with myself—might even think that I was too pleased with myself—and, so, had picked out something extra-special for me.

I knew, too, that Papa Grand had not idly said he had picked me because I was not politically minded. All the papers and men concerned could, from their records, have been the objects of political revenge of one kind or another.

I checked with all the well-known florists in Paris to see if they had made-up fruit and floral baskets on the days in question. None of them had. By the time I was ready to go and see Papa Grand, I had a feeling that although I could sense the kind of picture these crimes had made, I was missing the central character in them. That didn't make me very happy as I went into the Old Man's room.

Papa Grand was in a mellow mood. He poured a glass of Calvados for me, took one himself, drank it as he read my report, and then tipped backward in his chair and for a while stared at the ceiling.

Then he said, "All right, Mascaux, you've got it all there. All you need now is to find this shabbily dressed man. He's educated, elderly, clever with his hands, and he probably collects and repairs clocks and watches; also, of course, he knows more than most people about chemistry. A strong character, almost to the point of fanaticism—which, of course, is always based on love. Distorted love, perhaps, but none the less love. You agree?"

"Yes, *Patron*. There's a clear revenge motive. I also think that the dates of the outrages must have some significance. Probably anni-

versaries of events that mean a great deal to him. But I don't think it's a political revenge pattern."

"Why?" Papa Grand filled his glass but ignored mine. He had to be very mellow indeed to offer you two glasses.

"Because the editors and journalists concerned are not all of the same political convictions. Some are of the right, one of the left, and one is a liberal. So far as I can see, they only have one thing in common."

"Which is?"

I told him. They all acted as dramatic critics for their papers, but because of their standing they only covered the important productions.

"So," said Papa Grand, "we have a revenge motive associated with the theatre. An explosive mixture." He smiled. "You agree?"

"I do, *Patron*."

"I see that it is clearly established that the bombs went off around three o'clock at night. Do you agree with me that probably the exact time was three minutes past three?"

I looked blank.

Papa Grand chuckled. "What an actor you are, Mascaux. You want to keep everything to yourself. Very good. Then I shall ask you some more questions and see how blank you can manage to look. The basket of roses and apples—why roses and apples?"

"Because, *Patron*, they are an integral part of the pattern in this man's mind, somehow associated with whatever it is he is compelled to vindicate or revenge."

"True. But specifically, why roses and apples?"

I knew that I was being tested hard, and I knew Papa Grand well enough to know that not one word he spoke now was without significance. He could be helpful, but he never handed out anything openly. I looked stupid again.

Papa Grand made a rumbling noise in his throat and then said, "You stand there acting as innocent as an angel, Mascaux. But I know how deep you are. You want to keep all the credit for yourself. And you shall. Find this man. He will be gentle and make no trouble when you do. He's in love, Mascaux—a rare and dangerous love which some men have for some women. You know her name, of course. Yes, of course, you do. Dorothea. It has to be that, doesn't it?" He smiled, nodded his head at my silence, and said, "I'm glad you agree."

I left the room feeling as limp as a rag and wondering what had

ever made me think that I was worthy of being in the Department of Patterns. Just then I knew that I couldn't even hold down a job as a village policeman. And what is more, I knew that Papa Grand had just given me "the treatment"—not humiliation, but a lesson in humility. Somewhere along the line he had spotted that I was getting too cocky, too self-assured about my progress. He was just correcting the balance.

I sat down at my desk, opened the file, checked everything in it, read my own report, and then went back in my mind over every word Papa Grand had used during our interview. It didn't get me very far. According to Papa Grand, this man was presumably revenging an actress named Dorothea. How the devil did he know that? Apples, roses—and Dorothea. It didn't make any sense to me.

The next morning I went back to the newspaper offices, to the files of back copies. I made a list of the female members in the casts of all the plays which had been reviewed by the four men concerned. There wasn't a Dorothea among them.

If it hadn't been for my Department training I might have stopped there—but one of Papa Grand's maxims was that things and people are seldom labeled clearly. You must dig deep for the truth. I dug very deep, consulting theatrical agents on the telephone, and poring over reference books—and suddenly Dorothea appeared.

After that it was fairly easy. At five o'clock that afternoon I was admitted into the house of Mlle. Delabre. It was a modest little villa in Passy where she had lived all her life. Mlle. Delabre was a fragile, vague-minded woman of about 50, with gray hair; she wore a large cameo brooch at the tight neck of her black dress.

I said that I was a journalist and wished to have some details of her sister's career for a history of the French theatre which I contemplated writing. She was very happy to help me. Her sister had been the great Clea Delabre who had made her reputation before the war and then, some time after the war, had left the stage.

"She thought she was leaving it for good," said her sister. "But the pull of the theatre was too much for her. We had a little money, but somehow it went. All of it. So, two years ago she decided to return to the stage. Somehow we found help from backers, and then there was the problem of the play. Poor Clea, she liked nothing that was shown to her. In the end—unwisely now, I see—she put on a play of her own writing."

Mlle. Delabre smiled gently. "She was a great actress, monsieur, but not a great playwright. The play was very bad and the critics

were very unkind—yes, very unkind. I must confess that dear Clea went to pieces—even the greatest actresses, you know, can give bad performances."

"So it was a failure?"

"Yes. It lasted only one week—one week in January, two years ago. Clea collapsed. She was older than me. She died the following March, literally from a broken heart."

January, I thought, the month of the play's failure, of the scathing notices which I had read in the newspaper files.

Then March, the month of her death, the month also of the second bomb outrage.

"Was June a significant month for your sister?" I asked.

"She was born in June, monsieur."

"And August?"

"That was the month in which she made her first great success, long before the war—the month Paris acclaimed her."

"She was never married?"

"No. She was once very much in love—but he was killed during the war."

"Clea Delabre—the great Delabre," I said. "But her full name was Dorothea Clea Delabre, was it not?"

"Yes. But Clea—that was how the public knew her. In the family she was always Dorothea."

"Who is there left in the family who loved her as much as you do?"

"Only myself and my brother, Arnaud. He was devoted to her. He could tell you much more about her theatrical life than I could. He was her manager. Would you like to see him?"

"If I may."

She took me out of the room and led me across the hall to a study door. She knocked gently, called, "Arnaud," and we went in.

The walls of the room were crowded with books. There was a desk littered with papers, and a work bench under a far window: I was aware of the ticking of innumerable clocks. They were everywhere—on the walls, on the shelves, on brackets, and the bench was littered with an accumulation of clocks to be repaired.

"I'm sorry, he's not here," said Mlle. Delabre. "I remember now—he went out just before you came in. Really, my memory—"

"Where did he go?"

"I think I saw him carrying a basket of roses and apples. He loves giving them to his special friends."

"Apples and roses!"

"Why, yes, monsieur. What is the trouble?"

"I must know where he's gone!"

With a vague gesture of her hand she said, "Well, you could wait and ask him when he comes back. But he is very absent-minded. It sometimes worries me. Often he stays away all night. Then again he might be back in half an hour."

If he stayed away all night, the basket would be sitting in someone's house waiting to go off. I had to do something about it at once.

Vigorously, I said, "Mademoiselle, think! Does this particular day or month have any significance in your sister's life or in her theatrical career?"

To my surprise she nodded her head and said, "Why, of course it does. But why are you so upset, monsieur?"

"Please, just tell me."

"Well, this is the day Dorothea was confirmed. It is also her saint's day, monsieur. Maybe that is where Arnaud has gone—to the little church around the corner where she was confirmed. I remember now—he usually makes the cure a gift on this day. Dear, dear, how forgetful of me."

But I wasn't waiting to hear any more. I ran out of the house and into my car. Arnaud must be completely mad if he was now turning his attention to innocent people who had once been connected to Dorothea.

I caught him as he was coming down the steps of the cure's house, which was next door to the church. A woman was just closing the door and I saw in her hand a golden wickerwork basket piled with apples and roses.

I ran up the steps and held on to Arnaud. He was an elderly, grayhaired man with a long, drawn, tired face and a pair of gentle brown eyes.

I said, "Monsieur Delabre, I am from the police. I must ask you to wait while I get that basket back from—"

"The police?" he interrupted me mildly. "I see." Then he shook his head. "You do not need the basket, monsieur. It will harm no one. They are real apples and roses. You wish me to come with you?"

I nodded. I took him back to Papa Grand, and a man was sent to the cure's house to check the basket. It was harmless, as Arnaud had said.

Papa Grand was very courteous to him. "You loved your sister very much, monsieur?"

"Very much," said Monsieur Delabre. "She was a saint."

"Saint Dorothea." Papa Grand looked at me. "You understand, Mascaux?"

I shook my head.

Papa Grand turned to Monsieur Delabre. "Perhaps you would tell this young man, monsieur, the story of the real Saint Dorothea."

"But, of course," he said meekly.

And he did—the story of Saint Dorothea who was martyred in the year 303 at exactly three minutes past three—what a fund of knowledge there was in Papa Grand! As Dorothea went out from her sentence, the judge's secretary, Theophilus, had said mockingly, "Send me some apples and roses when you get to Paradise." That night as Theophilus roistered with his companions at dinner, an angel appeared to him bearing a basket of roses and apples; the angel said, "From Dorothea, in Paradise," and then vanished.

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Joyce Harrington

The Couple Next Door

Let's group three regular contributors to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine—Ruth Rendell, Christianna Brand, and Joyce Harrington. What do they have in common? First, the three are excellent writers. Second, they are women. Third, all three offer "something special" to mystery readers—each her own special "quality." And fourth, they write a certain type of suspense story that could be described as "stories that might happen to you"—because you can identify with the main characters and easily conceive of yourself in the situations or predicaments that these particular writers imagine. Joyce Harrington's story is that kind of story—plus. The plus is a reminder to us that all that glitters is not gold, or to go back further and perhaps be more apt, that appearances are deceptive . . .

The new couple next door was young and the girl was pregnant. It rained the day they moved in, a fine gentle mist, and as the girl trudged in and out of the building she raised her face to the wetness, her round eyes blinking and her blonde hair lank and straggling. Her husband dashed back and forth with his head lowered and his shoulders hunched, carrying chairs and boxes. They carried the large rolled mattress for the double bed between them.

The rented truck was soon emptied—they had few possessions—and the young husband drove it away. Carmela left the window and listened to the bumping and scraping sounds that came clearly through the shared walls.

"That's all I need," she complained into the telephone. "An infant screaming all night long. I'm on my feet all day and I need my sleep at night. And I'm sure I saw them bring in a hi-fi. I hope you told them not to play it after ten o'clock. I can't think why you rented to them in the first place. They look unreliable."

The landlord gave Carmela no satisfaction. "They paid cash—a month's rent and two months' security. Anything else, Miss Jade?"

Carmela slammed down the phone and began to dial again.

"Their furniture looks like thrift shop junk. He has long hair and a beard. She was walking around in the rain as if she were dreaming or doped or something. I tell you, I feel sorry for that baby. But what can I do?"

"You have a good heart, Carmela," her friend said. "Listen. I can't talk right now. Got to do some shopping. See you at work on Monday."

Carmela went into the bathroom and under the fluorescent light probed the roots of her glossy black hair. Were there more gray hairs than last time? She put on an old stained smock and a pair of rubber gloves. She mixed the dye in a plastic bottle with a long spout and began applying it to the gray roots.

While she worked, she heard the shower in the next-door bathroom start running. The bathrooms were back to back. She heard splashing and laughter, a high squealing laugh and a deeper more resonant chuckle. There were words, too, but the intervening wall and the sound of the rushing water robbed the words of sense. Carmela listened closely but could make out nothing of what was being said.

In the mirror her face under the muddy cap of black dye looked bare and strained. As a girl, her black hair, blue eyes, and pale skin had made her proud and demanding. She had dreamed of a handsome professional man, a doctor or lawyer, who would carry her away. None of her local suitors had quite filled the bill, and one by one they had married other less-demanding girls.

Carmela told herself she had no regrets. She was still as slender as a girl, but sometimes her shoulders sagged. The pale skin around her blue eyes was loose and puffy; tiny creases surrounded her lips, and the skin of her neck, under close scrutiny, was reddish and crêpy. She gazed into the mirror and listened to the laughing and splashing from next door.

"Disgusting," she said.

She went into the kitchenette and lit the oven. While she waited for the hair dye to do its work, she began making an applesauce cake.

The girl, breathless and rosy, turned the shower off.

"Dry my back, Dougie," she said.

"You look like you swallowed a watermelon."

"He's kicking. Put your hand right here."

"You must think I love you or something. Crazy broad!"

"Isn't it nice to have a shower? When I think of that crummy old bathtub! I like this place, Dougie. And the washing machines in the basement. No more launderette. And the little room for the baby. Oh, it's going to be perfect!"

"Well, put some clothes on, Big Mama. We still have work to do."

"Slave driver!"

"We have to put the bed together."

"One-track mind!" She climbed into a baggy pair of jeans and put on one of his old shirts. "Oh, Dougie, did you notice the lady watching us from the window? All the time we were unloading the truck, she stood there watching us. She looked like a witch. Right next door. Did you see her?"

"Nope. Come on. Let's get crackin'. I have to go out tonight."

"Oh, Dougie!" Disappointment dragged at her voice. "Tonight?"

"Yeah. And see if you can find my gun. I put it in one of those boxes."

Together they fumbled the bed frame into position. It occupied most of the bedroom. There was room for the dresser and an old high-backed rocking chair. Somewhere, in one of the boxes, was a cushion for the chair, a patchwork cushion the girl had bought at an Appalachian crafts festival because it reminded her of stories her mother had told her of the old days. She would have bought a quilt for the bed, but there wasn't enough money. There was never enough money. Together they heaved spring and mattress onto the frame.

The girl sat panting on the edge of the mattress. Her face was broad, round, and flattish, with a short upturned nose. Across this nose and the wide cheekbones a band of freckles stood out, glowing against her sudden pallor. She laid a hand on top of the mound of her stomach and took cautious sips of air, as if she were listening intently to some inner happening and was afraid of disturbing it with normal breathing.

"You okay, Karen?"

"Yes, I think I am." She answered tentatively, waiting for the true answer to be revealed. "Yes, I think everything is okay."

"You've had a rough day, Big Mama. Why don't you lie down for a while?" He sat beside her and stroked her long blonde hair, tucking damp strands of it behind her ears.

She laid her head back and his arm tightened around her. She sighed deeply, her breath warm and moist against his neck.

"I'm all right, Dougie. I was just a little out of breath. Everything's

really all right." As if to confirm this, color flooded back into her cheeks, and she kissed him lightly, reassuringly. "If you're going out, I'd better fix something to eat."

"Oh, hey, listen. Don't do that. I can get something on the way."

"Well, I'm hungry, too. And I really have to unpack that kitchen stuff."

She went to the door and looked back at the room—the bare mattress, the battered suitcases and heap of cartons in the corner, the uncurtained window. And her husband sat on the bed, watching her. Soon, she thought, soon I'll have it fixed up. I'll get new curtains and a soft fleecy rug for the floor. Soon we'll have enough money to get some nice things. Especially for the baby.

"I'd feel terrible if I let you go out tonight without any supper," she said. "Suppose something happens to you."

"Nothing's going to happen. I'm always careful. I've got to get ready. Frank's picking me up at seven thirty."

In the kitchen Karen unpacked a frying pan and a couple of plates. She found some bacon, eggs, and a loaf of bread. There was no milk; they would have to drink their instant coffee black. Tomorrow she would go shopping. While the bacon sizzled, she went into the living room and rummaged through the boxes there.

The early evening sunlight broke through the gray drizzle, sending a final golden shaft through the window, then faded into purple twilight. Karen plugged in a table lamp and set it on top of one of the hi-fi speakers. The hi-fi was new, a present from Doug. To keep her company, he said, when he was out late and she waited up for him. She had a growing collection of country-Western records. But she wouldn't have its company tonight. She didn't know where to put the hi-fi in this new room, and Dougie probably wouldn't have time to hook it up until tomorrow. Well, she could plug in the television in the bedroom and lie in bed watching it until he came home.

In the third box Karen opened she found the gun. It lay nestled in a neatly folded stack of new baby clothes, its hard blue-black contours shockingly bold against the soft whiteness of the little gowns and shirts. When Karen picked it up, it left its impression on the fabric beneath. Somehow it hurt to see the baby's clothes bearing that harsh imprint. She felt a vague sense of spoiled innocence and wanted to ask Doug why he had put the gun into that particular box.

But the bacon was now sputtering and smelled strongly of hot

grease. She put the gun down on top of one of the boxes where she knew he would see it, then hurried into the kitchen.

They ate fried egg sandwiches and crisp bacon—she'd saved it just in time—and drank black coffee. They spoke of the chores they would have to do tomorrow, settling into the new apartment. Karen always avoided thinking and speaking of what Doug did when he went out at night. By tacit agreement he never spoke of his nocturnal activities. At first he had tried to assure her that he was hardly ever in danger. But she refused to believe this, so he found it best not to speak of it at all. So far he had always come home safely.

The doorbell rang just as they were finishing their coffee. Doug looked at his watch.

"Must be Frank. He's a little early."

While Doug went to answer the door, Karen cleared away the few dishes. She was surprised to hear him call her.

"Karen, we have a visitor."

She dried her hands on her jeans—the towels had not yet been unpacked—and went, wondering, to the door.

"Oh," she said, "hello."

"Hello," said the woman in the doorway. "I'm your next-door neighbor, Carmela Jade. I hope you won't think I'm being pushy or nosy. I happened to notice you were moving in today, and I knew you wouldn't have time to do much cooking. So I brought you this cake. Just being a good neighbor."

Karen's eyes flitted from the cake on its cut-glass plate, to the woman's face, to Doug lurking behind the door and frankly grinning through his beard.

"Of course I would like to have the cake plate back," the woman went on. "But take your time about it. I'm right next door, apartment 2B. Been there for fifteen years. This has always been a quiet building. I hope you enjoy living here. Anything I can do to help you, just let me know. I believe in being a good neighbor."

"Thank you, Mrs. Jade." Karen was very conscious of the woman's sharp blue eyes searching past her into the apartment. "It's a beautiful cake."

"It's Miss, but you can call me Carmela. I hope we'll be friends. The last people who lived in this apartment were very good friends of mine. A nice quiet couple, no children." The woman's eyes rested on Karen's bulging middle. "What did you say your name was?"

"I'm Karen. And my husband is Doug Fletcher." As Karen

stepped forward to take the cake from Carmela Jade's outstretched hands, the woman gave an involuntary shudder, blinked rapidly, and backed off a few paces into the hallway.

"I'd ask you to come in for a cup of coffee," Karen said, "but we're still in such a mess."

"Some other time," the woman stammered. She shoved the cake into Karen's hands and fled down the hall to her own apartment. "Nice meeting you," she called over her shoulder. The door slammed behind her, and Doug and Karen could clearly hear the ramming home of several locks.

"What was that all about?" Karen wondered. "Did I say something scary?"

"Beats me. Is she the one you saw watching us from the window?" Karen nodded. "Um-mmm. Oh, Dougie, did you dig that hairdo? And about a ton of makeup. She looked like an aging geisha girl. But I wonder what made her take off like that."

"Be kind, Big Mama. Not everybody's as naturally beautiful as you. Are you gonna cut that cake or just admire it? I've just got time for a piece of cake before I meet Frank downstairs."

He picked up the gun from the top of the box. Karen went into the kitchen with the cake. She heard the sharp clicking sounds that meant he was checking out the gun, loading it from the handful of cartridges he always kept in the pocket of his old Army jacket. She turned on the water to drown the sounds. It was decent of him to meet Frank downstairs. Frank made her nervous. She was intimidated by his huge greasy bulk and his beady suspicious eyes, even though Doug had told her that Frank was a good man to be with in this night work, street-wise and cunning, never taking unnecessary risks. Frank wasn't married, and he made her feel like excess baggage.

When she came out of the kitchen with two slices of cake, the gun had disappeared. She knew it was in the bulging right-hand pocket of the fatigue jacket. She put the knowledge from her mind and munched the applesauce cake. It was spicy and full of raisins.

"Good cake," said Doug. "You'll have to get her recipe."

"If I don't scare her to death. I wish I knew what made her run off like that."

"Got to go now. You get some rest. I made the bed for you."

"Thanks. I guess I'll do some unpacking first."

"Don't work too hard. And lock the door behind me. Can't be too careful these days."

"But I *can't* come over now, Carmela. I'm in the middle of getting dressed. I have a date with Walter. What are you so nervous about, anyway?"

Carmela Jade whispered into the phone. "It's my new neighbors. They're crooks, drug addicts. I'm sure of it. She's a shifty-eyed little tramp. Pretending to be married, but I doubt it. And he was grinning at me like a wolf through that awful beard. There's something very wrong about them."

"Carmela. Stop imagining things. You're making something out of nothing."

"I am *not* imagining things. They have a gun. I saw it. Scared me half to death. And now he's gone out. He met this terrible-looking thug in front of the building and they went off together. Probably to murder innocent people in their beds and rob them of everything they own."

"Well, if he's gone off to murder someone else, he isn't going to be bothering you. Relax, Carmela, have a drink, watch television, get out your knitting. Anything, just get your mind off them. I've got to go now. Walter'll be along any minute."

"I never drink. I don't watch television, and I wouldn't be caught dead knitting. And I don't know why you go out with that Walter. He's nothing, a shoe salesman. You can do better than that."

"No, I can't. And neither can you. At least I get out once in a while and have a little fun. I don't sit home inventing murderers. Do you want to come out with us? Walter has a friend. We can pick you up."

"Thanks, but no thanks. Any friend of Walter's couldn't possibly be worth my time. And if I don't show up at work on Monday, you'll know it's because I've been murdered in my own apartment by those freaks next door."

"Stop exaggerating, Carmela! Just lock the door. I've got to go now."

"It is locked. Yale lock, chain lock, and police lock."

"Goodbye, Carmela. Have a nice night."

"Wait. Don't go yet—" Her voice was slammed back at her by the empty line.

She looked around her apartment. Reclining lounge chair to soothe her aching legs and feet after the long days at the department store, days that seemed to get longer as the years went by; the three-piece suite, carefully saved for and scarcely used; coffee table with magazines precisely arranged to display their titles; shelves with

knick-knacks; her collection of china dogs of nearly every breed. A real dog would make messes and have to be walked. It was all perfect, just the way she wanted it, and perfectly neat. Visitors seldom came, and there were no relatives with noisy dirty children. For no apparent reason Carmela felt like crying.

She walked purposefully into the kitchenette. No chores to be done there. The mixing bowl, cake pan, and the remains of her own small supper had long since been tidied up. With an almost absent-minded air she opened a cupboard. Her hand, with its long, strong, red-painted fingernails, snaked its way unerringly to the space behind the oatmeal carton.

The bottle was about half full. Years ago, how many she did not care to dwell on, she had been in the habit of mixing the vodka with tomato juice. She had long forgotten who had introduced her to Bloody Marys—one of that unending stream of unsuitable suitors, no doubt. The stream had dried up; only the habit remained. But all that tomato juice had given her heartburn. The vodka on its own merits was much nicer. And quicker.

She poured half a tumblerful and dropped in two ice cubes. The oily liquid gleamed invitingly in the glass, purer than water and far more quenching to the parched and thirsty soul. But before Carmela would allow herself even one sip, she stowed the bottle away in its dark hiding place and wiped the counter clean of any possible spots.

She carried the glass into the living room, settled into her reclining chair, and with the remote control switch in one hand, the glass in the other, took her first sip while tuning the television to any program that would engage her interest and take her mind off the problem of the couple next door. Occasionally, in the quieter moments between car chases, shootouts, and commercial breaks, she heard thumps and patterings from the apartment next door. Probably stowing away a whole arsenal, she thought—rifles, hand grenades, Molotov cocktails. What if they were members of some lunatic liberation army? The whole building might go up in one earthshaking blast. It could happen!

Carmela groaned and eased herself out of the recliner. Might as well go to bed for all the comfort she got from television. She refilled her glass, then meticulously performed the bedtime ritual she had never once neglected in all her adult life. She creamed her face, brushed her teeth, wrapped her head in a satin turban to protect her hairdo. She ~~massaged lotion into her hands~~, then put on a pair

of white cotton gloves to keep the lotion working all night.

All this done, she shook into one gloved hand a single red and blue capsule. The vial was almost empty. The capsule looked so cheery, bright blue and vibrant red, and electric violet where the two ends overlapped. She must remember to get the prescription refilled. It wouldn't do to get caught some night without a cheery pill to blot out the long uneventful day. Carmela popped it into her mouth and washed it down with a mouthful of vodka.

Propped against two ruffled pillows, Carmela flipped the pages of a magazine while waiting for sleep to free her mind of the probable past and future iniquities of the brazen couple next door. The magazine, usually much concerned with 101 ways to cook hamburger and the problems of a certain movie-star princess and her teen-aged daughter, featured an article on how, or indeed whether, to protect yourself against rape. Carmela sipped her vodka and read of knees applied with a swift upward motion, of biting, gouging, scratching, of heels or heavy wooden wedges ground into insteps, and finally, of the probability of winding up either victorious or dead if you tried it at all. She hadn't considered the neighboring threat in this light at all, but anything was possible with that kind.

At last she felt the approach of the lovely gray fog. Her eyelids grew heavy and her jangled nerves relaxed. The words on the page ceased to make sense and she dropped the magazine to the floor and switched off the bedside lamp. For a moment all was silent in the darkened room. Carmela drifted . . .

Then a burst of sound through the intervening wall jolted her wide-awake. What on earth was going on next door? Scarcely moved in and having a wild party already? Carmela envisioned unspeakable activities just beyond her bedroom wall. But when she sat up to rearrange her pillows, she recognized the sound for what it was. The television in the next apartment was blaring forth the eleven o'clock news.

She raised her gloved fist to thump a reprimand on the wall. But then, fearing reprisal, she drew back her hand. The landlord would certainly hear about this in the morning! Let him deal with it. That was his job. He was responsible for renting the apartment to dangerous young criminal types. If anybody was going to get shot at, let it be him. No telling what those two would do if they were crossed.

But in the meantime what was *she* to do? Her head ached and her eyes burned, but the droning of the television kept her just on the edge, would not let her fall asleep. Another pill? Maybe that

would do it. She staggered into the bathroom, shook another cheery pill into her white glove, and downed it with a mouthful of water from the tap. Then back to bed. In twenty minutes or so Carmela slept, mouth open, her satin turban slightly askew, her gloved hands clenched beneath the coverlet.

Beyond the wall the television murmured of love and intrigue and other late-late movie subjects . . .

A brazen gong rang and the gun in Carmela's hand went off with a thud, thud, thud.

"You're doing it wrong. Do it again."

Once more the gong. And the gun went off, but Carmela couldn't get her finger on the trigger. If she could only find the trigger, she could make it stop. Her hand felt numb.

"Again, Miss Jade. Again, again, again, Miss Jade."

A disembodied male voice issued commands and she had to obey.

The gong echoed and the gun kept firing. It was firing at a store mannequin and hitting it every time. The mannequin's head fell off.

"Miss Jade! Miss Jade!"

Thud, thud, thud.

Carmela opened her eyes on blackness. Someone was calling her name and banging on her door. The doorbell pealed. The luminous hands of the alarm clock dazzled and swam so that she could not tell what time it was.

"Coming . . . I'm coming . . . just a minute."

She groped for the bedside lamp, while the knocking and shouting continued. Her gloved hands fumbled with the switch, and all her movements seemed sluggish and clumsy. At last she managed to light the lamp. She blinked away the last vestige of sleep and looked again at the clock.

Three thirty! In the morning! Who could be knocking at the door and calling her name? What would the neighbors think? Oh, the neighbors! She remembered who her new neighbors were, and her lips pressed thin against each other.

"Be quiet!" she muttered. "I'm coming."

She crawled out of bed and found her robe. Knotting the belt, she lurched through the darkened living room to the door.

"Who is it?" she whispered to the closed and thrice-locked door.

"Miss Jade? It's me. Doug Fletcher. I need your help. It's Karen."

"At this hour of the morning?"

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"Miss Jade, please. I'm sorry to wake you up," came the shaking voice from the other side of the door. "I need to use your telephone. We don't have one yet."

Carmela paused with her hand on the police lock. It could be a trick to get into the apartment. Once she let him in, she'd be alone and defenseless while he had a gun and could do what he liked with her. She could tell him to leave his gun at home, but then he'd know that she knew. No! That would never do.

"Miss Jade? Are you there?"

"There's a bar down the street. Don't they have a phone?"

"I've already been there. It's closed. Miss Jade, I think Karen's going to have the baby. Please let me use your phone."

"Just a minute."

Carmela hurriedly made a circuit of the living room, turning on every lamp, even the overhead fixture she never used because of its glare. She returned to the door, took a deep breath, and unlocked the police lock. She slid its long steel bar out of the groove and held it in her hand while she unlocked the Yale lock. She left the chain lock in place and opened the door the few inches it allowed. She peered through the slit at the distraught figure in the dimly lit hall.

Doug Fletcher was not a reassuring sight. His eyes were red-rimmed and he sagged with fatigue. Or drug-induced lethargy—Carmela could not be sure which. He wore a disreputable Army jacket and faded jeans. He supported himself with one hand pressed against the door jamb, and Carmela was very much aware of the strength and menace that could be lurking in his square blunt fingers. Why, he could strangle her before she could make a sound. Every day the newspapers told of women being beaten, stabbed, strangled for a few dollars or for no reason at all.

"Why don't you ask the landlord? He's got a phone."

"I tried. He doesn't answer the door. You're the only other person I know here. Please, Miss Jade! I just need to call the doctor and a taxi. Karen—she's—I think she overdid it today. The baby's not due for another month, but she's having—pains."

"Well. All right. Just a minute."

Carmela closed the door again and unlocked the chain lock. She swung the door wide to allow the young man to pass.

"Leave the door open," she said. "The phone's over there." She indicated a low table and small chair against the wall.

"Thanks, Miss Jade. I'm really sorry to wake you up in the middle of the night. Now where's that phone number?" He began groping

in his pockets as he shambled across the room.

Carmela remained by the door, watching him closely. Maybe she had misjudged him. Babies often did come in the middle of the night, at least in the magazine stories she read. And young husbands were always ten times more upset than the brave young wives.

Carmela's imagination leaped to the days ahead when she would offer her mature advice to the inexperienced young parents. Perhaps with a baby to set an example for, Karen and Doug could be induced to improve their own appearance. Carmela felt like a benign conspirator in the shaping of three lives. Her fears had been foolish. Her new neighbors were just young and ignorant. She prepared her face to smile and offer to sit with Karen until the taxi arrived.

At the telephone table Doug began unloading his pockets.

"I know it was here," he muttered. Carmela was about to point out the telephone directory when she saw the gun in his right hand. In an instant she felt the terrible wrench of betrayal. She had been right all along! He was here to threaten and rob her! Maybe even to kill her!

His back was still turned to her. Quickly, before he could turn around, before the gun was pointed at her, she had to protect herself. Fear, rage, and self-vindication lent her strength.

She rushed forward with the steel bar of the police lock clutched in both white-gloved hands. She brought it down on the back of his head with more force than she thought she could muster. He crumpled silently to the floor.

She picked up the phone and, after several fumbling attempts at dialing, managed to get connected with the police.

"I have just apprehended an armed robber," she stated. She responded calmly to the unemotional voice at the other end of the line, giving her name, address, and the particulars of her adventure.

It wasn't until she put down the phone that reaction set in. Her legs felt queer and her stomach fluttered wildly. She sank into the recliner and pressed both hands over her eyes. She wanted desperately to know if the young man lying on the floor was dead or alive, but she couldn't bear to look at him let alone touch him. She was still in the recliner when sirens wailed and tall men in uniform began to fill her living room.

Several of them clustered around the body on the floor, hiding it from view, while another sat beside Carmela and questioned her. Earnestly Carmela told of her suspicions, of the trick played on her

to gain access to her apartment, of the gun being drawn and her instant stroke of self-defense. She felt calm and heroic. She would be written up in the newspapers.

Out of the whispered consultation over the body one man raised his head and addressed her questioner.

"Hey, know who this is?"

"A known criminal, I have no doubt," said Carmela.

"Not exactly, lady." He read from an open wallet in his hand. "Douglas Martin Fletcher. Badge Number 17582. Narco Squad."

The man who had been questioning her turned and looked at her with stony eyes. Carmela felt bewildered.

"A policeman?" she quavered. "Is he—?"

"You guessed it, lady. Nice going."

More men arrived—men in rumpled suits and in the white jackets of ambulance attendants. Carmela lay ignored in her recliner while their voices rumbled over her head. In a sudden hush she followed their eyes to the door. A small voice pierced the stillness.

"I heard the siren: Did Dougie call an ambulance? I don't think I can wait much longer."

Carmela had just a momentary view of the pale freckled-face, intense and anxious in the doorway, before Karen was surrounded by a protective phalanx of broad blue shoulders and swept away.

Her questioner returned.

"Better get dressed, lady. You'll have to come with us."

"Yes. Of course. May I make a phone call first?"

"Okay. But make it fast."

Carmela went to the extension phone in the bedroom. She stripped off her white gloves and dialed the familiar number. The phone buzzed many times before she heard the answering click.

"Hello?" the voice was blurred with sleep.

"I won't be in the store on Monday. Something has come up."

"You had to call me *now*? Carmela; you're really crazy."

"Maybe I am. Read the newspaper if you want to know why."

"What happened? What's going on?"

Carmela replaced the receiver. She felt an odd lightness, a sense of walking on a strange new path. Maybe she would never have to go back to the store again. From her closet she took her best black dress. She sat at her dressing table and began making up her face. Good thing she'd done her hair today. There might be photographers.

Hugh Pentecost

The Dark Saga

In this short novel, complete in this anthology, Hugh Pentecost imagines an international situation in which a hundred corporations "are on the verge of running the world . . . and where such enormous power exists, the abuse of that power is bound to occur in some quarters."

Mr. Pentecost's prototype of a multifaceted corporation is called Quadrant International. Its head man so thoroughly believes that might is right, that power in his hands will benefit mankind, that he considers himself above all conventional rules: QI sells services worldwide; it sells machines that can perform skilled labor better than skilled people; it influences vital public relations through the ownership of newspapers, publishing houses, TV and radio networks; it can shrink the planet by controlling airlines and shipping lanes . . . Suppose a company manufacturing a soft drink could sell one bottle a day to each of 800 million Chinese? The multinational corporation promoting and distributing such a product—and a thousand other products!—could aim at breaking down all trade barriers so that the ultimate in profit could be achieved in a kind of Global Supermarket.

In such a corporation, Mr. Pentecost imagines a head man so powerful that he considers himself above the law—able and willing to buy some foreign governments, to silence or remove enemies, to achieve his conglomerate goals by any means—blackmail, boycott, terror, violence . . .

It is that head man whom Jason Dark is trying to identify, that unknown supertycoon whom Jason Dark is pursuing single-handed—literally . . .

Detective-Avenger: JASON DARK

The most irritating and difficult thing for Jason Dark, normally a right-handed man, to do was to use his left hand. He had to learn to write with it; he couldn't handle a typewriter except at a snail's pace; he was a steak eater and there was no way he could cut a steak, at least in public.

In the privacy of his own apartment in New York's Murray Hill district he could manage it. He could cook the steak with not too much difficulty, get it on a plate, hold it down with his plastic right hand, and cut it with the left. He could hold the steak down no matter how hot it was, because, of course, there was no feeling in the plastic hand. And he was getting more skillful, day by day, at cutting with his left hand.

There were other small but irritating problems. He had always carried his change in his right-hand trouser pocket, his bills in the left. Now everything had to go in the left-hand pocket. He couldn't manage so simple a thing as a belt. He had to have buttons put on his slacks so that he could wear suspenders. It took him a long time to get the suspenders attached to the slacks, but that could be done in private.

He couldn't manage a necktie so he began wearing turtleneck knit shirts, most of them navy-blue or black. Cleaning his wire-rimmed, slightly tinted glasses was an awkward business.

He had to wear his shoulder holster under his right arm instead of his left. It was an exercise in futility. When his right hand had existed he could shoot out a snake's eye at 50 feet. Left-handed, he'd told himself bitterly, he couldn't hit a cow with a handful of rice.

The worst part of it in the early days was that each minor difficulty recalled the memory of the horror. There was the man in the black ski-mask, speaking in his muffled voice. There was the vision of his own right hand, strapped to the butcher's block in the deserted restaurant kitchen. There was the agony of the blow on his hand with the flat side of the meat cleaver, the pain of shattered bones. And then he could hear the man in the ski-mask, shouting in a kind of maniacal rage when Dark still refused to answer questions, then the meat cleaver chopping his hand into bloody shreds. He could hear his own screaming. He had no absurd hero's pride about taking pain stoically. It helped to scream, helped to hear it.

Then he remembered coming to in the park where the torturer had dumped him, the young couple running wildly away from him, having seen the bloody nothing that had once been a hand as Dark reached out to them for help. He could still feel the tourniquet on

his arm, placed there by the policeman who swore and swore, almost in shock, as he took Dark to the hospital where the amputation was completed, made to look neat.

It was the end of a way of life for Jason Dark. He had passed his fiftieth birthday. For 22 years he had been on the police force, rising in rank from patrolman to detective. For five years—until the night they worked on his hand—he had been a private investigator. He was a short rotund man, who looked more like a school-teacher, with his wire-rimmed glasses, than a cop. But he'd had the reputation of being a tough cookie—thorough, disciplined, but tough.

Now he had to begin a new way of life. One-handed he couldn't fight anyone, couldn't handle a gun, offensively or defensively. But violence simmered like a soup on the back burner of his mind.

One of the attributes that had made Jason Dark a good cop and a better-than-good private operator was his ability to make decisions objectively—without any interference from his emotions. He never made a move out of pity; not that he couldn't feel pity. He never made a move out of anger; not that he couldn't feel anger. He moved, on a case, only as fast as the facts permitted, never by the emotional desire to hurry the payoff on his own behalf, or to satisfy a client.

Jason Dark was going to destroy a man for what had happened to his hand. But the man he was after was not the man in the ski-mask who had actually engineered the mutilation and torture. The man in the ski-mask was simply a weapon used by someone else. It was a waste of energy and time to hate ski-mask and to hunt him down. You don't hate a weapon—a gun, or a knife, or a meat cleaver. You hate the man who uses the weapon against you.

Jason Dark's target was far beyond the man in the ski-mask, beyond him and above him in the echelons of power. And it was a far more complex plan than the simple business of an eye for an eye, a hand for a hand. It would have been easy enough to set some sort of booby trap. The price of a hit man or a bomb expert to knock off a man was well within Dark's means at today's prices in a violent world.

Jason Dark had been forced to answer a question for himself. Death for the king of an empire was too simple. The only real punishment for the king would be to destroy his empire, to shatter his power. Could one man, a one-handed man, destroy an empire more powerful than many governments, an empire with armies and wealth greater than most men could realistically imagine?

Jason Dark thought he could.

With patience and care and cunning he thought he could.

The door read: *Evans Secretarial Service*. Dark, carrying a large brown-leather suitcase, came off the elevator on the fourth floor of the Chrysler Building, walked straight to the door of the office, and went in, as if he were a frequent visitor. He had looked over the door from the outside the day before, but this was the first time he'd gone inside.

A young attractive girl was seated at a typewriter desk, her fingers flying over the keyboard. She gave Dark a cheerful smile but went right on working. Unmarred, unspoiled, he thought, like girls in his nostalgic past. She was golden blonde, her hair hanging loose around her shoulders. She came to a stopping place and her smile widened.

"Can I help you?" she asked. Nice voice.

Dark glanced at an unmarked door to the right of the girl's desk. "I'd like to speak to the boss, if I may," he said.

She laughed. "I'm the boss, the help, the messenger service," she said. "I am It. That door leads to a coat closet."

"Evans Secretarial Service?"

"Sharon Evans," she said.

"Well, Miss Evans, I picked you out in the Yellow Pages, mostly because you're close to my home base on Fortieth Street." That wasn't why he had chosen her, but she could not know that. He put down the suitcase and held out his black plastic hand. "This is quite recent," he said. "I haven't learned to write too well with my left hand and typing with one finger of one hand is a disaster." He braced himself against the pity he saw in her blue eyes and the self-pity that tended to produce. "Can you transcribe from tapes, Miss Evans? I have a bagful of tapes here."

"No problem," she said.

He lifted the suitcase to her desk and began fumbling at the catches with his stubborn left hand.

"Let me," Sharon Evans said, and she opened the case.

"There are fifty half-hour tapes there," Dark said. "How long would it take—"

"With the commitments I have you'll have to give me a week," Sharon Evans said. "You see, there's just me."

"A week's fine. I'm in no hurry," Dark said. He gave his name, his address on 40th Street, his telephone number.

"Sixty-five cents a page," she said.

"Fair enough. Let me know when it's done, Miss Evans. And thank you."

On the sixth day after that, in the late afternoon, Sharon Evans, carrying the leather suitcase, rang the doorbell of Jason Dark's apartment. He opened the door, his sandy hair slightly rumpled, his eyes blinking behind the tinted glasses as though he'd been asleep.

"Forgive me for coming here, Mr. Dark," the girl said, "but I'm fascinated by this material."

"Oh, really? Come in, Miss Evans."

The room she found herself in had a pleasant, warm feeling for Sharon Evans. It was lined with bookcases that were crammed with books. There was a large flat-topped desk littered with papers—clippings from newspapers, letters, notebooks. The faded Persian rug was a museum piece, she thought. There was a sofa, two overstuffed armchairs, and an elaborate radio with shortwave and overseas bands on it.

"You have given me a whole new view of life, Mr. Dark," Sharon said. "Oh, I've read about multinational corporations and conglomerates, but I never dreamed they were so powerful!"

He waved her to a chair. "These multinational corporations have more impact on people than most sovereign governments," he said. "They make daily business decisions that influence where people will live, what they will eat, drink, and wear, what sort of knowledge schools and colleges will encourage, and what kind of society our children will inherit."

"But they are so big!"

He smiled at her. She was like a bright-eyed little girl being told a fairy story by her grandfather. "General Motors is bigger than Switzerland, Pakistan, and South Africa put together," he said. "Dutch Shell is bigger than Iran, Venezuela, and Turkey. Goodyear Tire is bigger than Saudi Arabia."

"And this Quadrant International you're writing about?"

"Bigger than any two of the big ones," Dark said.

She sat forward in her chair. "Who is going to publish your book, Mr. Dark?"

"Book?"

"What I've just finished typing for you."

"Oh, I hadn't thought of it as a book. Just a record for myself."

"Mr. Dark, you've got a gold mine here!" She brought her hand down on the suitcase. "Do you have an agent?"

"An agent? Oh, you mean a literary agent. No, I hadn't thought of—"

She leaned forward and covered his left hand with hers. "Jason, I have a very good connection with Tyler and Shane, one of the best publishers of nonfiction in the country. Could I show them a copy of your book? I'm sure they'll snap it up."

"Oh, I don't know, Sharon," he said. She had used his first name first.

"It would be a great feather in my cap if I could bring Paul Tyler a best-seller," she said. "Please, Jason!"

"Well, if you want to," he said. "Only I must say I think you're overrating it. I mean, who could possibly care about Quadrant International?"

"The whole world will care when they've read it," Sharon said. She had jumped up and was opening the suitcase. "May I take the top copy?"

After Sharon had left, Jason Dark smiled to himself. He had chosen Sharon Evans to transcribe the tapes, not because her office was close to his apartment, but because he was certain she would want to take the manuscript to Tyler & Shane, Inc. The result could be the opening up of a considerable can of worms.

Three days later, just as Jason Dark was having his first cigarette of the morning along with his second cup of coffee, his phone rang. A secretarial voice told him that his caller was Mr. Paul Tyler of Tyler & Shane, Inc.

"Mr. Dark? I'm Paul Tyler. I suspect you know who I am."

"Well, yes," Dark said. "Sharon Evans told me. When would you like me to pick up the manuscript?"

"Pick it up! My dear Mr. Dark, I very much hope you will *not* pick it up. I found it simply fascinating. I think we are going to want to publish it and make you a very famous man."

"Do you really mean it?" Dark made it sound as though he was overwhelmed.

"My partner, Patrick Shane, is reading the book right now," Tyler said. "I know he's going to be as enthusiastic as I am. We'd like our lawyer to go over it to make certain there is no possibility of libel, then we'll have to draw up a contract. Today is Tuesday. Will you come in, say, Thursday morning at ten o'clock, and we'll suggest a deal?"

"Well, yes, of course."

"I notice there is no title on the book," Tyler said. "What would you think of *The Earth Managers?*"

"That certainly describes the operations of Quadrant International," Dark said.

"See you Thursday," Tyler said. "I look forward to meeting you."

Ten minutes later his phone rang again. It was Sharon, very excited. "Jason! Isn't it marvelous?"

"I have to admit I was surprised."

"Can I come to see you after work—say six o'clock? We must celebrate!"

She arrived at five minutes past six, glowing, and carrying a bottle of champagne. "I've had it in the office cooler since lunchtime. Oh, Jason, I love you!" she said.

He looked at the bottle. His mouth tightened. "I'm afraid I can't open it," he said.

"I know that, you idiot, of course you can't. I've always thought women were cheated of the pleasure it must be to pop a champagne cork."

She popped it. She poured. She offered a toast to a "new millionaire author" and they drank. Then she put her arms around his neck and kissed him on the mouth. "I really do love you, Jason," she said softly.

He pulled away. The champagne was dry and stimulating. "Don't be absurd," he said. "I am old enough to be your father."

"My sweet Jason, what on earth does age have to do with it?"

Quite a bit later Jason Dark had to admit to himself that age had absolutely nothing on earth to do with it.

Thursday morning, ten o'clock.

Jason Dark, wearing a black turtleneck shirt, a gray tweed sports jacket and gray slacks, was in Paul Tyler's office at Tyler & Shane's. Paul Tyler looked strangely forbidding on that Thursday morning. He was suntanned, conservatively dressed, and scowling at his partner, Patrick Shane, who was quite different. Shane was blond, his clothes were very mod, and his smile was ingratiating. He had a rather bothersome stutter that somehow added to his charm.

"I'm p-leased to m-meet you, Mr. D-Dark," he said. "B-but sorry it should b-be under these circumstances."

"Pat feels we cannot publish your book, Mr. Dark," Tyler said grimly.

"Oh?"

"I disagree entirely," Tyler said, "and we've had a rather serious quarrel over it. But Pat has persuaded some of our stockholders to go along with him and they've tied my hands. I'm sorry, really sorry."

Shane gave his shoulders a deprecating little shrug. "Quite frankly, Mr. D-Dark," he said, "we'd be sued out of our shoes by Quadrant International."

"I'm sorry to have raised your hopes, Mr. Dark," Tyler said, "and I'll be glad to help you find a publisher who isn't as chicken as we seem to be."

"It's n-not a matter of b-being chicken," Shane said, apology in his voice. "Quadrant International could p-put us out of b-business overnight if they chose."

"Our lawyer still has your manuscript, Mr. Dark," Tyler said. "I'll have it delivered to you late today or tomorrow morning. Again, I'm deeply sorry."

Dark nodded, turned, and walked slowly out of Tyler's office, his shoulders drooping. Tyler, watching him go, could not have guessed that Jason Dark's eyes were very bright behind the tinted glasses, and that he was smiling as if he were pleased.

Jason Dark dawdled on the way home, window shopping. He spent a considerable time looking at the lingerie and negligees in the window of a smart boutique. He wondered if he had the taste to buy just the right thing for Sharon Evans. Eventually he discussed with a saleswoman the proper thing for "his daughter who was going on her honeymoon."

There was considerable sly humor before he went away with a white lace see-through nightgown. If he had made the choice himself, he might have bought black, but the saleswoman persuaded him that white was the wiser choice.

Sharon was sitting outside the door of his apartment, in tears. Tyler had phoned her to tell her the news. Dark tried to comfort her while he fumbled for the key in his left-hand trouser pocket.

He finally got the door open and they went in. Sharon's voice rose in a little scream.

Jason Dark's apartment was a shambles. Hundreds of books had been taken out of the bookcases and scattered on the floor. Furniture had been overturned, filing cabinets ransacked. Without bothering to check, Jason Dark knew what would be missing—the carbons of the manuscript Sharon had typed and the tapes she had transcribed.

He watched silently while Sharon, now familiar with his apartment, searched. A tiny smile moved the corners of his mouth. She was so young, so lovely, so quick to become enthusiastic, so quick to give in to despair.

"All gone, Jason!" she said finally, looking like a small child about to burst into tears. "Thank God that Paul Tyler still has the master copy."

"I doubt very much if he'll be able to return it to us," Dark said. "I'm afraid the lawyer for Tyler and Shane will discover that his copy of the manuscript has been stolen."

"Jason!"

"Would you make us a pot of coffee, my sweet?" he asked. "Then I'll acquaint you with some of the facts of my life."

They sat facing each other in the two overstuffed armchairs, she leaning forward eagerly, he leaning back, holding his coffee cup in his left hand.

"I have used you," he said bluntly.

She smiled at him. "My pleasure," she said.

"You should dislike me for it," he said, "though I hope you won't. You see, I picked you out very carefully to transcribe my tapes. I knew of your connection with Paul Tyler and I was sure you'd offer to take my manuscript to him when you'd finished it."

"But why not, Jason? It's a marvelous exposé."

"I've been working on this case a long time, Sharon. You see, Quadrant International is responsible for this." He held out his black plastic hand. "I was convinced someone at Tyler and Shane had connections with Quadrant International. I was certain that when that someone read the manuscript Quadrant International would be promptly notified."

"But, Jason, they've destroyed your book, your tapes."

"Not quite. There is another set of tapes," he said.

"Where?"

"It would be too dangerous for you to know," he said. "You might be visited by a man in a black ski-mask."

"But what good will this do you, Jason?"

"Time will tell," he said. "Now would you please help me put this apartment together again?"

Three days later someone was pounding on the door of Jason Dark's apartment. He opened the door to find Sharon standing there, her eyes wide.

"Have you heard the news, Jason?" It was almost a whisper.

"What news?" he asked.

"Patrick Shane has committed suicide. It was on the radio."

"Well, well," Dark said. "Come in, Sharon."

A cleaning woman had found Patrick Shane in his Park Avenue apartment, his brains blown out, the gun lying on the floor beside him. There was no suicide note. His business associates could offer no reason for what Shane had done. He was well off, a success in business, living an apparently happy life.

Dark poured Sharon a drink.

"Since this may be the last time you will want to see me," he said, "I think I should tell you that Shane did not commit suicide."

"But, Jason—"

"Listen," he said. He walked over to his desk on which a small tape recorder rested and switched it on. The tape ran for a second or two, then a cold hard voice said, "So what is your proposition, Mr. Shane?"

"One m-million d-dollars d-down payment paid to me in c-cash." The voice was unmistakably Patrick Shane's. "F-fifty thousand a year retainer. A b-bonus for any information about Quadrant when it p-proves valuable. N-no b-bargaining. That's it."

Dark switched off the recorder. "So you see, Sharon, Patrick Shane was murdered by an agent of Quadrant International. It appears Shane betrayed Quadrant."

"But, Jason, where did you get that tape?"

"I said it 'appears' he betrayed them," Dark said. He smiled at Sharon. "I didn't 'get' that tape. I made it." His smile widened. "I've always b-been p-pretty good as a m-mimic."

"Jason!"

"I sent the tape to someone higher up in the chain of command at Quadrant. His response was the murder of Patrick Shane, and that tells me what I need to know to take the next step toward the man at the top."

"You're going to fight Quadrant International all by yourself?"

"I am fighting Quadrant International all by myself," Dark said.

"Who is the man at the top?" she asked.

"I don't know yet. But after the next move, or the next, I may see his face at the end of the tunnel."

"I'm going with you," she said.

"I have just told you that I've killed a man, even though I was sitting in this room when he was shot," Dark said.

She came out of her chair and knelt in front of him. She took his hand, the one that had feeling in it, lifted it to her lips, then looked up at him, her eyes bright.

"What's our next move, Jason?" she asked.

Jason Dark had worked for weeks preparing a case for Senator Stanton to present to his fellow Senators. The Wilson-Strohmeyer Bill, had it passed, would have struck a sharp and painful blow to Quadrant International and other multinational corporations that were trying to become the Earth's Managers.

While he was waiting for the Senator, Jason had come out by the swimming pool and had sat down in one of the aluminum deck chairs to watch the child floating on her back. She had waved to him, although she didn't know him, and he had waved back with his right hand. He drew it down quickly. It was still instinctive for him to use it.

The girl turned over and swam like a joyful porpoise, diving below the surface, rising up again and blowing water, then diving again. Finally she came to the edge of the pool where he sat. It was the shallow end of the pool and she stood up. She took off her bright-scarlet bathing cap and shook out shoulder-length dark hair. She was about ten years old, he guessed. "Hi," she said.

"Hi," Jason said.

"Do I know you?" she asked. "Or, rather, should I know you, since I don't know you?" She laughed.

"I'm Jason Dark," he said, "which I'm sure doesn't mean anything to you. You must be Elizabeth Stanton."

"Everybody calls me Liz," she said. "Nice to meet you, Jason."

He had passed his fiftieth birthday but somehow she wasn't fresh; she was just being very natural.

"What's with your hand? I mean that black glove," she said.

No adult would have asked that direct question. Jason Dark's mouth tightened into a thin line for an instant, then it relaxed. "An accident," he said.

"Is your hand scarred or something?" she asked.

"It isn't really a hand," he said. "It's just a plastic substitute."

"Oh, wow!" the girl said, interested but not shocked. "How did it happen?"

How it happened she wasn't going to know, but the question sent unwanted images rushing across Jason Dark's memory screen.

"It got crushed in an accident," Dark said to the girl.

"Were you right-handed?" she asked.

Damn her persistence, he thought, but not angrily. She was just a curious child. "Well, I'm having to learn to write again. And it's hard to eat in public."

Her eyes clouded. "I don't think I want to talk about it any more, Jason," she said.

"I don't want to talk about it, either," he said. He smiled at her. "Tell me, where did they hold you, Liz?"

Her eyes widened with excitement. "It was in a little cottage by the ocean. I never saw how we got there so I don't know." She stopped, clapping a hand over her mouth. "Oh, gee, I promised Daddy not to talk to anybody about it. Not *anybody*!"

"So we'll forget you said anything," Dark said.

A young man came out of the house and over to where Dark was sitting. "The Senator will see you now, Mr. Dark. He's sorry to have kept you waiting."

"No sweat," Dark said. He stood up. "See you around, Liz."

"I'd like that, Jason."

Dark followed the Senator's aide toward the house.

"She's very quick with first names," the young man said.

"Rather nice, though," Dark said. "It helps you to know right away whether she likes you or not."

Senator Rufus Stanton was in his second term in the United States Senate, elected overwhelmingly by his Midwestern constituency. He was a young vigorous man with an attractive smile, light blue, rather shrewd eyes, and hair the color of his daughter's.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Mr. Dark," the Senator said. He looked up from the desk in his study, lined with calf-bound law books. He waved Dark to a chair. "I suppose you're disappointed in me."

"Astounded is more nearly the right word," Dark said. He fished a cigarette out of his left-hand jacket pocket, put it between his lips, then produced a lighter from the same pocket. He narrowed his eyes against the smoke. He was just beginning to manage simple things, like lighting a cigarette with his left hand.

The young Senator's voice sounded ragged with fatigue. "I thought about it and thought about it, Dark, and I finally decided not to make the speech in support of the new bill. I voted for it, of course."

"And it lost by two votes," Dark said. "A speech by you in support, with your eloquence, Senator, might have turned a dozen doubters

into supporters. They were waiting for it. And so Quadrant International and a hundred other multinational corporations will continue to spread out over the globe like monstrous spiders!" Dark's voice had risen slightly, but now it was low again. "Well, at least, thank God she wasn't hurt."

The Senator's head jerked up, his eyes wide. "What the hell are you talking about?"

The sunlight streaming through the study windows glinted on Jason Dark's tinted glasses. "You are a man whose integrity is beyond question, Senator. You are dedicated. You used information I supplied you with, plus the investigations of your personal staff, to build a case against multinational corporations in general and Quadrant International in particular. A speech from you on the Senate floor in support of the Wilson-Strohmeyer Bill would have put a crimp in the indecent profits and the actual anti-American operations. You backed off at the last minute. I tried to guess why, and I could come up with only one answer. Someone had kidnaped your daughter. To get her back you had to keep your mouth shut."

"What nonsense!" Stanton said.

"They held her in a little cottage by the ocean," Dark said. "She couldn't see how they got there, so she can't tell where it is."

"Oh, my God!" Stanton said, his voice shaking.

"I'm sorry, Senator. I threw her a curve. She spoke a sentence and a half before she realized she was breaking her promise to you to say nothing to anyone about it."

"You'll never be able to guess what it was like," Stanton said, turning his head from side to side, pain etched on his face. "Everything I believed in, everything I'd spent months working on was at stake. The Vice-President kept looking down at me, knowing I was going to make a speech in support of the bill, waiting for me to ask for the floor, to be recognized. And all the while I could hear that voice on the phone. 'Make your speech, Senator, and you will never see your daughter alive again.' What else could I do, Dark, knowing they had Liz? It was right, wasn't it? She was returned, safe and sound, less than an hour after the Wilson-Strohmeyer Bill was defeated."

"I guess I would have done the same thing," Dark said. "She's a lovely child."

"She's mine, my flesh and blood!"

Dark nodded. "So the milk is spilled, Senator. There's no point in crying over it. I have to go on with the fight, even if you can't."

"How can I help?"

"You could turn over your files to me, the information collected by your staff. I think I know it all, but there might be something there I've missed."

The Senator picked up his phone and gave an order to his secretary. He leaned back in his chair. "I've never asked you something that interests me, Dark. I know you were a policeman before you became a private investigator."

"Twenty-two years as a cop and a detective," Dark said. "Then five years on my own."

"You gave all that up for a private crusade against Quadrant International," the Senator said. "Why?"

The end of Dark's cigarette glowed red as he took a deep drag on it. "You are a decent, liberal idealist, Senator," he said. "You were for legislation that would curb the power of the multinational corporations. All of them, not just Quadrant International. You don't like them because some of them buy elections in countries where there are elections, and even help arrange governments by assassinations in countries where the people have no voice. I have another reason. High up in the chain of command of Quadrant International is the man who gave the order for this!" Dark's voice shook. He held out his black plastic hand.

"If you can prove that—?"

"I will prove it," Dark said. "But it isn't just enough to destroy that one man, Senator. I intend to pull down his empire along with him."

"According to your information—notes supplied by you, Dark—General Motors is bigger than Switzerland, Pakistan, and South Africa put together. Royal Dutch Shell is bigger than Iran, Venezuela, and Turkey. Goodyear Tire is bigger than Saudi Arabia. Quadrant International is bigger than any two of a hundred big ones. You, one man, propose to destroy that kind of power?"

"Or die trying," Dark said quietly.

When Jason Dark unlocked the door of his room in Washington's Hanover house Sharon, who had been sitting by the windows overlooking the Potomac, came quickly across to him and threw her arms around him, holding him close.

"My poor darling, what happened?" she asked.

Jason Dark had felt old and tired coming up in the elevator. Sharon's cool fingers on Dark's cheek revived him.

He looked at her steadily for a moment through his tinted wire-rimmed glasses, as if to make certain she was real and not a mirage.

"The Senator's daughter was kidnaped just before he was due to make his speech," Dark said. "No speech or else. He had no choice."

"And the girl?"

"Home, safe and sound." Dark described his brief visit with Liz Stanton.

"How awful for the Senator—and for the child's mother," Sharon said.

"The Senator is a widower," Dark said. "He lives quite simply. A cook-housekeeper and young Michael Braden, his aide and secretary, are the entire household."

"Make you a drink?" Sharon asked.

"Not just yet," Dark said. He walked over to the windows and looked down at the river. "Let me try something on you for size."

She came over to stand beside him, her arm linked through his. He looked at her, smiling faintly. "There are only a very few people in the world who can't be bought. There's you, and me, and at the moment I can't think of who else."

"Thanks for including me."

He touched her bright gold hair. "This was a tricky business, Sharon. It had to be handled very precisely. Given time to think about it, the Senator's reaction might not have been predictable."

"I don't follow."

"If Liz Stanton had been kidnaped hours before, or a day before, the Senator might have considered calling in the F.B.I., or some other course of action. But this is how it happened. The Senator got up at his usual time, had breakfast with his daughter as always, then went to his office in the Senate building. Just as he was about to go into the Senate Chamber to make his speech he got a phone call. 'No speech or else!' He had no time to think, to weigh one action against another. He acted out of instinct, out of love."

"So?"

"This was terribly important to Quadrant and the others. Their plan wouldn't have been haphazard. They had to know exactly what the Senator planned to do. Would he make a speech in support of the Wilson-Strohmeyer Bill? It didn't matter how he voted, only if he planned to make the speech that would sway other votes. They had to know for sure and they did. Then there was the time pressure. They had to know exactly where Liz Stanton would be so they could snatch her. They couldn't risk her wandering off somewhere, or

going to visit some unknown friend. They had to know *exactly* where she would be at the critical moment."

"How could they know that?"

"From someone in the household," Dark said. "Someone who knew that on Thursday mornings a special tutor came to the house to help Liz make up school work she'd lost because of a bout with measles. She *had* to be at home."

Sharon's eyes widened. "The housekeeper? The Senator's secretary?"

"I think we can eliminate the housekeeper," Dark said. "The person who told them—I think we should call them the 'enemy'—also had to know that the Senator was definitely going to make the speech. I can't see any reason for the Senator to confide in his cook. That leaves us with young Mr. Michael Braden, the secretary."

"He was an accessory to the kidnaping?"

"It would have to be proved," Dark said. "How?"

Dark walked over to the desk in the corner of the room and wrote something on a plain sheet of paper. He handed it to Sharon. "See that this is delivered to Mr. Braden at breakfast time tomorrow morning."

Sharon glanced at the message. It read: "Come to the cottage at once. Urgent."

"If he ignores that we're barking up the wrong tree," Dark said.

At a quarter past eight the following morning Michael Braden hurried out of Senator Stanton's house, went to the garage, and backed out his personal car. Gravel spattered against the fenders as he drove out onto the main highway. He looked around nervously. He saw the blonde girl in the parked car across the way, but she meant nothing to him. He had no reason to think he might be followed or that the blonde girl might be the follower.

Dark's plan was simple enough. If Braden took the bait he would drive to the "cottage by the ocean" where Liz Stanton had been held. There were some "ifs," of course. He might check out the message with someone by phone and discover it was a fake. But it was unlikely he would make such a call from the Senator's house. The Senator still hadn't gone to his office. Besides, the message itself would imply that a phone call was risky.

If he took the bait and drove to the cottage, Braden would have inadvertently confessed his guilt and Dark would learn who owned the cottage and where it was. Sharon was assigned the job of fol-

lowing because Braden knew Dark by sight and would instantly suspect something if he got a glimpse of him.

Dark waited by a pay phone about a block from the Senator's house.

Sharon, driving a rented car, followed Braden's car. It was difficult only because Braden drove so fast. Most of the traffic was coming into Washington. Braden was headed east, across Maryland, toward the ocean.

Checking her wrist watch, Sharon began to wonder if they could possibly reach their destination in less than an hour. Liz Stanton had been delivered safely home in just under an hour. Ahead, Braden's car turned off the highway. He drove up a small side road toward a high point of land. Sharon was puzzled, because this was nowhere near the ocean. Then off to the left she saw a large lake.

Up ahead Braden turned into a private driveway. Sharon drove straight on past the drive, catching sight of a name on an RFD mailbox. CARTER CLEAVES.

Sharon left her car about a hundred yards past the driveway and made her way through a dense pine woods to where she could get a view of the Cleaves house. It was something more than a cottage. It had wide picture windows looking out over the lake that Liz Stanton had mistaken for the ocean.

She could see Braden. He was standing by the front door. He had rung a bell, and getting no answer he was pounding on the door with his fist. No one answered, and Braden began to circle the house, peering in at the windows. Presently he gave up, evidently finding no one inside the house.

He stood by the front door again, anxiously consulting his watch. Finally, after a short wait, he wrote something on a page in a small notebook, tore out the page, and slid it under the front door. Sharon guessed his problem was to get back to the Senator before his absence was noticed.

Sharon didn't make any effort to follow Braden on the return trip. Her job was to find a telephone.

Dark answered her call almost instantly. He had been standing by the phone booth all the time.

"Jason? The child mistook a large lake for the ocean. The house belongs to someone named Carter Cleaves."

She heard soft laughter from Dark. "You know who Carter Cleaves is?" he asked. "A duly and legally registered lobbyist for Quadrant International."

"Jason!"

"Bingo," he said.

"Braden's on his way back in a big hurry," Sharon said.

"Go to the hotel and wait for me," Dark said. "Hope we have cause for celebration."

Braden, driving in the heavy stream of traffic now, chafed at the slowness of it. When he finally reached the Senator's house he was wet with sweat. He put his car in the garage and hurried into the house. Mrs. Devens, the cook-housekeeper, was dusting the living room.

"Has the Senator been asking for me?" Braden asked.

"No, sir. He's gone to his office, of course."

"I have to pick up some things in the study," Braden said.

"Mr. Dark is in there, sir," Mrs. Devens said. "I thought it would be all right."

Braden stood very still, looking toward the study door. He took a handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped the perspiration from his face. Then, his legs moving stiffly, he walked into the study.

Dark was sitting at the Senator's desk, the Quadrant file in front of him. He was smiling, a faintly mocking smile.

"Good morning, Braden," he said. "It seems that part of the puzzle is explained."

"Puzzle?" Braden moistened his lips.

"I've wondered how the kidnapers got Liz back home in less than an hour if she was, in fact, being held 'by the ocean.' The child, who must have been scared out of her wits, mistook the lake in front of the Cleaves house for the ocean."

"The Cleaves house?" Braden asked, his voice husky.

"It will save us a good deal of time and fencing," Dark said, "if I tell you that I sent you the note that took you out to the Cleaves house this morning. You see, I wanted to know whom you'd sold out to. I knew it was someone at Quadrant, but who in the chain of command?"

"I—I don't know what you're talking about!" Braden said.

"Do I have to spell it out for you?" Dark asked. "You sold out the Senator, friend. You kept Quadrant informed of his intentions about the speech. You gave them the information that assured them Liz would be home at the critical time. I imagine you gave Mrs. Devens some little job to do that kept her occupied. When I have told the Senator; God help you."

Frantic choices were mirrored in Braden's eyes. Choices—and fear.

"Of course, when Carter Cleaves is confronted with the proof that his house was used to hold the Senator's child he will deny all knowledge of it. He will say his unoccupied house was used by criminals. He will be told how we know—that you answered a fake note which led us to the house. He will, of course, deny that he has ever had any contact with you."

"But he will be sweating, just as you are, Braden. He will know that you may spill the whole story. He won't be able to risk that, so I suspect he will take steps to silence you. Permanently. It won't be just a warning, like this." Dark held up his black plastic hand. "Whatever you decide to do, Braden, you are up the well-known creek."

"This is all madness!" Braden said. It was nearly a whisper.

"I took the liberty of going through your room upstairs while I was waiting for you," Dark said. "You are an amateur, Braden, and like most amateurs you don't take the most obvious precautions. Only an amateur would keep his bankbooks where someone might find them. I'm afraid you'll never get to spend the twenty-five thousand dollars you deposited in your savings account three days ago." Dark stood up. "Bunglers pay a heavy price for their bungling."

He picked up the Quadrant file and started for the door.

"Wait!" Braden said. He had moved around the desk. "There must be some way to—"

"There's no way," Dark said. He stepped to the door.

"Wait!" Braden said. "Wait if you want to live, Mr. Dark."

Dark turned. From a desk drawer Braden had produced a murderous-looking handgun. It was pointed straight at Dark's heart.

"Obviously I can't let you go through with this," Braden said.

Dark's smile was contemptuous. "You haven't got the guts," he said.

He turned his back on Braden and extended his left hand to the doorknob. Braden's finger pulled the trigger. There was a dull click. Again and again he pulled it. Dark turned.

"Do you suppose for a minute that I would confront you, Braden, knowing that you would back-shoot me the minute you had the chance? I found the gun long before you got here and pulled its teeth." He jiggled the cartridges in his left hand. "I also have an eye for shoulder holsters and pocket bulges. If you'd been carrying a gun I'd have shot you dead." He patted the holster under his right

armpit. "I'm not very good with my left hand, even after some months of practice. But at a distance of five feet—"

"Oh, God!" Braden moaned. He sank down in the desk chair and covered his face with his hands.

"Now we will see how good Mr. Carter Cleaves is at this game," Jason Dark said. "Too bad you won't be around, Braden, to witness the outcome."

He walked out into the warm summer sunshine. He hoped Sharon had decided on champagne. She got such a delight from popping the corks.

Carter Cleaves, his modishly styled hair nicely gray at the temples, his dark blue tropical worsted suit expertly tailored at the shoulders, his feet lovingly shod in calf by a Florentine bootmaker, leaned back in an armchair in his suite in New York's posh Hotel Beaumont. He was smiling in a detached sort of way, as if he was politely ignoring his sensitive olfactory system. It was the garishness of the man who straddled a straight-backed chair facing him that offended Cleaves. He saw crew-cut black hair, narrow but shrewd black eyes, a ghastly plaid sports jacket, offensive hound's-tooth slacks, white buckskin shoes (soiled), and a batique sports shirt (unbelievable). Cleaves, a disciple of elegance, told himself that Joe Foxworth's getup would have been frowned on even in the men's room of a third-rate West Side saloon. Cleaves had to remind himself that Joe Foxworth was a top operator in his field and essential to the moment.

Foxworth grinned. "There's a purpose in everything, Mr. Cleaves. Nobody will forget this God-awful getup, they will always associate it with me, so that when I choose to be 'not noticed' it becomes duck soup."

Cleaves' smile twitched the corners of his mouth. "I'm glad you told me—"

"I have a report for you," Foxworth said. He was all business now. He took a small notebook out of his pocket and turned to an early page. "His name is Jason Dark. He was born in Brooklyn Heights in 1923. His father was an accountant. His mother was private secretary to a big real estate operator. He went to public school, high school and somehow managed to get to Columbia University. His aim was law school. He flunked out in his second year."

Cleaves, his eyes turned away from Foxworth's immoral jacket,

looked suddenly carved out of marble. "That surprises," he said. "I would have thought him far too clever to have flunked out of anywhere."

"Maybe he was late-blooming," Foxworth said. "Maybe it was because his father and mother both lost their jobs in the big crash of 1929. Jason Dark was trying to work his way through school and help support his parents at the same time. The load must have been too heavy." Foxworth turned a page, then two. "Never married. No history of womanizing—until very recently."

Cleaves turned to look at Foxworth, an eyebrow raised.

"About three months ago a very young woman, a real glamour chick, seems to have moved into his life."

"Go back a way," Cleaves said.

"He joined the Manhattan police force when he was twenty-three. Graduated from the Police Academy with very high ratings. Served for twenty-two years, rose to the rank of detective in the Homicide Division."

"His record?"

"Unexpectedly tough. He was finally in trouble for being a little too quick with a gun. He retired from the police force and got himself licensed as a private eye. About a year ago he took a case that led him into our backyard. Somebody took care of him."

"How?"

Foxworth moistened his lips. "He was beaten and tortured. His right hand was so badly mangled that it had to be amputated. He wears a plastic hand now, covered with a black glove. He has learned to do everything left-handed."

"But he didn't quit."

"He sure didn't quit," Foxworth said. "He stopped taking clients, but he didn't quit as far as Quadrant International is concerned. Six months ago he set a trap for Patrick Shane of Tyler & Shane, one of our outfits, one of our people. We had to erase Shane before he gave us away." Foxworth's eyes glittered. "That brings us to you, Mr. Cleaves. He's got you over a barrel for kidnaping Senator Stanton's child."

"We held her for less than an hour," Cleaves said. "We returned her unharmed. The Senator voted our way and we let the child go."

"But Dark knows it was you," Foxworth said. "You, the top lobbyist for Quadrant International in Washington. He's got to be gotten permanently out of our hair."

"How?"

"It's almost certain he's got records, tapes, God knows what else hidden away, to be sprung if something violent happens to him. It's got to look like an accident, impossible to connect to us."

"Can you manage it?"

Foxworth moistened his thin lips. "Give me a day or two," he said. "Meanwhile, Mr. Cleaves, stay virgin-pure."

Jason Dark looked at the little stack of travel folders on the table in front of him. A breeze from the open French windows that led to the little backyard garden of his East 40th Street apartment in the Murray Hill district fluttered the folders. Dark rested his black-gloved plastic hand on them. It served as an adequate paperweight and not much else, he thought.

Dark loved the room, its walls lined with books. Nothing bad had ever happened here. It had been a sanctuary after countless violences. It was the place where he had remade himself, psychologically and physically, after the terrible mutilation.

Sharon came out of the kitchen carrying a steaming mug of black coffee laced with Irish whiskey. She put the mug down on the table beside him, within reach of his left hand. She ran her cool fingers through his sandy hair. He looked up at her through his faintly tinted wire-rimmed glasses with a kind of wonder. For the first time in his life he was not alone. He had argued the discrepancy in their ages, reminded her that he was old enough to be her father. He was not a romantic figure, not an eager young stud. And yet, she loved him.

"Are we planning a holiday, Jason?" she asked, looking down at the folders.

"We are planning a holiday for you," Jason Dark said.

"You've turned every day into a holiday, darling," she said, and bent down and kissed his cheek. Then she perched herself on the arm of his chair. "You're in one of your rare nonsensical moods. Holiday for me?"

He touched her face with his left hand. "You've made my life over, Sharon. You've made me stronger in many ways, but you've also made me vulnerable where I was never vulnerable before."

"I've taught you to love, and to enjoy loving," she said. "Is that bad?"

"That is beyond belief marvelous," he said, "but it also makes for weakness."

"Maybe we should get someone to prescribe the proper vitamins."

He went through a newly learned routine. Cigarette in his left-hand pocket, lighter in his left-hand pocket, the whole operation managed left-handed. "Let's be serious," he said.

She put her cheek against his for an instant. "Anything you say."

His eyes narrowed against the smoke from his cigarette. "Carter Cleaves is holed up in a suite at the Beaumont. Washington is his beat but he's here in New York, waiting."

"For what, Jason?"

"Till his man can eliminate me as a nuisance."

"His man?"

"A foot soldier, you might call him, named Joseph Foxworth. Someone has said that the law is no more than a thin crust over a nest of soldier ants. Foxworth is a soldier ant. Death has become a big business in the world of big business. Foxworth deals in death. At the moment I'm his target."

"But since you know he's after you, aren't you one step ahead of him?"

"That brings us back to you, Sharon—my weakness."

"I don't understand."

"Suppose they should attack me through you? They could take you, hold you, harm you." He hesitated for a moment, looking down at the black glove on his plastic hand. "I'd back off, throw in the towel, throw in my weapons if you were threatened. That's my new weakness."

"Jason—"

"Hidden away, as you know, is an accumulated mass of evidence against Quadrant International. If anything suspicious happens to me it will be turned over to the proper authorities."

"You haven't told me where it's hidden."

"So that you could never be forced to tell. To get back to Foxworth, he won't shoot me from a rooftop or plant a bomb in my car. That would trigger my agent to release the evidence I have."

"Don't they want the evidence more than they want you?"

"They want both, and they'll try for both," Dark said. "But my death is going to have to look accidental. A traffic accident, a fall from someplace I would logically be, perhaps a simple street-alley mugging that could happen to anyone. I know Foxworth's history as an assassin. I would expect him not to think of you. I am his target. But Carter Cleaves? They pressured the Senator with a kidnaping. It might occur to him to get at me through you. So the vacation."

"No!"

"You will pack, I will wave goodbye to you at the airport. They'll see you go and forget any dreams they have about using you."

"No."

"At the first stop you'll disembark and take the next flight back to New York. We'll arrange a place for you to stay when you return. Not here."

He smiled at her. "Because I couldn't live if I didn't know where I could reach out and touch you."

"Jason, I love you."

"And of course I'd want you to be my chief mourner—if it should come to that."

The man with the black glasses sipped at a white crème de menthe, poured over crushed ice, with a brandy float. Carter Cleaves toyed with a glass of Perrier water with a twist of lemon. In his highly sensitive political job for Quadrant International, Cleaves rarely touched anything alcoholic. He had to be at the starting gate, around the clock, every day of his life. The two men were seated at a small table in a dark corner of the Blue Lagoon, a nightclub located off the lobby in the Hotel Beaumont. It was a table usually reserved for lovers or romantics. The man with the black glasses knew just how much to slip from his wallet to the captain stationed by the red-velvet rope at the entrance. The man with the black glasses knew just how much it would take to buy almost any man in the world. That was his special expertise.

"I'm glad you came by," Cleaves said to the man with the black glasses. "I'm a little concerned about our orders relating to Jason Dark."

"They come from the top," Black Glasses said, in an almost toneless voice.

"I'd like to understand why our approach to Dark has changed."

Black Glasses touched thin lips to his frosted drink. "In our world, Cleaves, we have to weigh the odds. Dark is a very dangerous and tenacious man." He lifted his glass and turned it round in the faint light.

"Why wasn't he simply eliminated in the first place?"

"He has some documents that he stole from our files. He managed to make some tape-recordings that would be disastrous if they were made public. We had to have those documents and tapes. We over-powered Dark in a restaurant that was run by people on our payroll.

One of our men strapped his hand to the butcher's block in the kitchen when the place was deserted. He waited until it was deserted so that no one would hear." He moistened his lips as though what he was telling gave him sensuous pleasure. "First our man broke the bones in Dark's hand with the flat side of a meat cleaver. Then, when Dark wouldn't tell where the evidence was hidden, he chopped his hand to shreds with the blade of the cleaver."

Cleaves' fingers were unsteady as he fumbled with a cigarette. "Why didn't Dark turn over the evidence to the authorities when he was free?"

"There is a special and individual twist in every man's character," Black Glasses said. "We were prepared with counter publicity, with evidence to suggest that Dark's material was faked, but nothing happened. Dark's special twist of mind is to get even with the man at the top. He actually believes that he can bring down the temple single-handed. Each move he makes hurts us in some area. He almost got you in the Stanton case. We've got to stop him from chipping away at us."

"So the evidence will be made public. If I am to fight that in Washington I need to know—"

"Dark has a friend, a lawyer. His name is John C. Fenimore. He lives in an expensive suburb here in New York and spends more than he earns. He's in deep, almost critical financial difficulty."

"How do you know?"

"We've covered every acquaintance, friend and business client of Dark's. We have bought the sources of dozens of possible leaks. We are convinced that John Fenimore has the evidence, or knows where it is. The minute your man Foxworth finishes Dark, I will be in Fenimore's office. If Foxworth does a clean job and Fenimore thinks it's an unfortunate fatality unconnected with us, I think he can be bought. He will no longer have to worry about loyalty to his friend. When will Foxworth move?"

"He phoned me just before I joined you. He'll act tomorrow night. The exact time depends on Dark's movements."

The telephone on the bedside table in Jason Dark's apartment rang a little after midnight. He reached for it, aware of his loneliness. Sharon had left late that afternoon. He had seen her off at Kennedy Airport. He had kissed her goodbye and waved to her as she went through the gate and had watched Joe Foxworth watching him.

Foxworth, he thought, must have sweat a little, wondering if Dark himself was about to take flight.

"Hello," Dark said into the phone.

"Mr. Dark? Raoul here, at the Beaumont."

Raoul was the captain in the Blue Lagoon Room.

"You have news, Raoul?"

"Mr. Cleaves has just left here with his friend. I wasn't able to identify the friend."

"Damn!" Dark said.

"No one on the staff here and none of the security people knew him. But I do have the liqueur glass he drank from, in case there might be fingerprints—"

"Bless you, Raoul."

"I owe you," Raoul said. "This is part payment."

Jason Dark knew that the moment would not come in broad daylight. Foxworth was not a man to make his escape more difficult than need be. It would come after nightfall, probably tonight, Dark told himself.

There was never any way to make absolutely certain that you would win a battle. There was always the possibility of some unforeseeable miscalculation. He remembered his old Chief of Detectives saying, "Someone you count on stops off for a short beer and is two minutes late—too late."

There was the chance of failure. Dark spent most of the afternoon writing two letters. One of them was addressed to Sharon Evans. It took time to write it, because Dark told her things about himself that he had never told anyone else, things he was proud of and things he was ashamed to remember. Most difficult of all was telling her how much he loved her, how much the short time they had been together meant to him. He had never tried to put love into words before. He wanted her to know what was in his heart—just in case.

If he was right about Foxworth she would never see the letter. But if he was wrong, if something hurried Foxworth, threw him off course—

The second letter was addressed to "John Smith" at a post office box at Grand Central. In it was the name of a bank and the number of a safety deposit box.

Late in the afternoon, with the sun setting hot in the west, Jason Dark dropped his two letters in the mailbox at the corner. He was not afraid, but he was ready for defeat . . .

Shortly after eight o'clock that evening Jason, wearing a raincoat although there was no threat of rain, left his apartment and walked several blocks to a Longchamps restaurant. He ate a leisurely dinner of scallops and bacon and a green salad. He drank a glass of Chablis. He smoked two cigarettes with his coffee laced with Irish whiskey. The waitress watched him, fascinated by the way he handled everything with his left hand, and wondered about the black glove on the right hand he never used.

He paid his bill and went out onto the street a little after nine o'clock. He walked over to Third Avenue and paid his way into a movie theater. It was an X-rated sex movie, but it is doubtful that Dark saw any part of it. The only sign that he wasn't asleep was the frequency with which he glanced at the watch on his left wrist.

Shortly after eleven he started home to his apartment, both hands in the pockets of his raincoat. He paused once to look in a shop window. He was right. Foxworth had stopped two windows behind him. It would be quick when it came.

He walked slowly up the hill from Third Avenue toward his apartment. He was only four or five houses from his own when he felt Foxworth's gun-in the small of his back.

"In the alley!" Foxworth said.

Jason Dark drew a deep breath and walked into the alley.

"Turn around," Foxworth said.

Jason turned. Foxworth stood almost against him, his gun pressed against Jason's breastbone.

"You idiot!" Foxworth said. "Before you die I want you to know who killed you and why."

"I was almost certain you would," Dark said.

A young boy who had seen the two men walk into the alley had, somehow, been certain that he was the witness to a mugging. Before he could decide what to do he heard the shots. Four shots. He ran for the corner, turned, and saw the mugger emerge from the alley. He found a policeman about a block away.

The news came over the radio and television networks in the early hours of the morning. "A man, identified as Jason Dark, aged fifty-two, was shot to death by a mugger only a few yards from his home on East 40th Street shortly before midnight last night. Dark's wallet was found beside the body, stripped of any money he might have been carrying. His driver's license helped the police to make an identification. Sergeant McClory of the 15th Precinct told reporters

it looked like a simple mugging, possibly by some drug addict desperate to find the money for a fix."

In his room at the Beaumont Carter Cleaves turned off the television set. Foxworth had done a perfect job, he told himself. No clues, no eyewitness. A clean hit. Cleaves decided to break his rule and have a drink. He took a silver flask from his bureau drawer and swallowed some bourbon raw. He could feel his nerves, drawn taut all night, begin to relax.

Across town, in a side-street hotel, the man with the black glasses switched off the radio in his room. Tomorrow morning, he told himself, the game would be played out.

John C. Fenimore, attorney, stood up to greet the man who walked into his office. Mr. Lucien Mayfield wore heavy black glasses, and he had a wide, white, almost glittering smile.

"Thank you for seeing me," Mayfield said.

"Any friend of George Stevens, my old law professor," Fenimore said, and waved Mayfield to a green-leather armchair. "If I sounded reluctant when you called it's because I was upset by the unexpected death of a close friend."

Mayfield, his eyes hidden by the black lenses, made a church steeple out of his slender fingers. "Jason Dark," he said.

Fenimore, in his early fifties, looked ten years younger, sun-tanned, well-conditioned—he also looked surprised. "You knew Jason?" he asked.

"Of him, Mr. Fenimore, including the fact that he was your client. As a matter of fact, it's because of Jason Dark that I came to see you."

"Oh?"

"It will save us a great deal of time if we don't beat around the bush, Mr. Fenimore. I suspect your loyalty to your friend, while he was alive, would have been staunch and unassailable."

"I certainly hope so," Fenimore said.

"But now that he is no longer here, no longer has his own personal crusade to fight, I think you and I should face realities."

Fenimore reached for a cigarette in the box on his desk and lit it. "What sort of realities, Mr. Mayfield?"

"Global and personal," Mayfield said, the light from the window glittering against his black lenses. "We have watched old-fashioned diplomacy crumble in Indochina and the Middle East. Peace and war and economic stability are no longer determined by nations, by

governments. Today's world is controlled by a few hundred multi-national corporations. I represent one of the largest."

Fenimore's eyes were narrowed against his cigarette smoke. "Since you are interested in Jason Dark, that corporation must be Quadrant International."

"Quite right," Mayfield said. "Jason Dark had an obsession about Quadrant. He stole documents and tapes from us, threatened our destruction brick by brick. Ironic that he should have been killed by some ordinary street thug. Now those tapes and documents, made public, could damage our corporate image, but not destroy us. We know that you have access to those materials, Mr. Fenimore."

"If you're suggesting that I—"

Mayfield held up a silencing hand. "Let's not waste time, Mr. Fenimore. I know what your financial position is. I know that your home in the country is mortgaged to the hilt. I know that you're deeply in debt to banks and to friends. I'm prepared to make you an offer for those materials. Dark doesn't need them any more. You could, I suppose, sell them to our competition, but we can and we will top any other offer. Your loyalty to Dark is no longer useful to him."

Fenimore leaned forward and crushed out his cigarette in an ashtray on the desk. "How much money are you talking about?"

The man with the black glasses smiled. This, as he had said, was his special expertise, guessing the price for treachery. Fenimore was too knowledgeable to listen to a chicken-feed bid.

"Let's begin by talking about half a million dollars," Mayfield said. "That will take care of your mortgage, your debts, and leave you rather handsomely well off."

"There is only one trouble with that offer," a voice said from the doorway behind Mayfield. "Jack's house isn't mortgaged and he hasn't got any debts."

Mayfield spun around in his chair, and seemed to freeze. Leaning against the door jamb, smiling very faintly, was Jason Dark.

"The trouble with unlimited power and wealth, my friend, is that you tend to underestimate how much can be done without it," Dark said. "You've got it all on tape, Jack?"

Fenimore nodded.

"So now, Mr. Gutzman, I will do the dealing," Dark said.

"My name is Lucien Mayfield," the man said.

"Your name is Adolph Gutzman," Dark said. "Former secret agent for the East German government until you joined Quadrant; expert

at terror, hijacking, kidnaping. I have your fingerprints off a liqueur glass you used last night at the Beaumont. Interpol had no trouble giving you a name and a dossier."

"But you—" The man with the black glasses looked stunned. "You were supposed to have been killed last night."

"It was intended that I should be killed by your man Foxworth," Dark said. "You and your people are so sure of yourselves you grow careless. I fed Quadrant the phony reports on Jack Fenimore's finances. And last evening I wore a raincoat on a bright moonlit night. Foxworth didn't bother to wonder why."

Gutzman just stared.

"An old bulletproof vest I had from my days on the riot squad. A loose-fitting raincoat kept Foxworth from noticing I was unnaturally fat. I knew he wouldn't back-shoot me. He would have to have the satisfaction of letting me see who he was, wanting me to die thinking I had lost to Quadrant. We stood in the alley, an inch apart. He fired three shots into my protected gut. I fired one into his unprotected heart."

A trickle of sweat ran down Gutzman's face.

"I left my empty wallet beside him," Dark said. "I prepared Fenimore, here, for your visit this morning. Now, Mr. Gutzman, you have a choice. Or do you? I want the name of the man who gives you orders. If you give it to me your own people will have you killed. If you don't I will prefer charges against you for conspiring to commit murder." His mouth tightened. "But your people would probably find you in prison and kill you there, for having failed. It isn't much of a choice, is it, Mr. Gutzman?"

Sharon Evans sat on the couch in Jason Dark's living room, clinging to his arm as though she was afraid he might dematerialize. "It was all fine, Jason. I was back in the New York hotel room waiting to hear from you when the news came on television. They said you were dead—it was so real, so definite—oh, Jason!"

He stroked her cheek. "If I'd told you how I was going to play it you'd have insisted the risk was too great."

"But suppose you'd been wrong? Suppose he'd shot you in the back?"

"It wasn't as risky as I've made it sound. My friend, Sergeant McClory, wasn't ten yards away from me all evening."

"But the boy who saw Foxworth run out of the alley after the shooting?"

"He saw 'a mugger' run from the alley," Dark said. "That, of course, was me, not Foxworth."

She held him very close. "Jason, do you have to go on with this? Are you really any closer to your goal after running these risks?"

"Much closer. A study of Gutzman's schedule for the last few months will take me nearer to the top," Dark said.

"Us' nearer to the top," Sharon said.

He smiled and touched his lips to the soft golden hair at the nape of her neck. "Us," he said. "Thank you for that, my sweet."

By some miracle Sharon had fallen in love with him, and, as summer turned to autumn, had come to live with him. He was no Don Juan. Young men whistled, at least figuratively, when they saw Sharon Evans. She was lush, she was alive, she was eager, and unbelievably, she was his.

Jason Dark looked at her, curled up in the corner of the sofa, her head against his shoulder, her cool fingers reaching up to touch his cheek. He brushed his lips against her gold-blonde hair.

"What would you do now if you were Mr. Big?" Sharon asked.

"If I were Mr. Big I would not take it lying down," Dark said.

"So what would you do—standing up?"

She stroked his hand, the right hand that was covered by a black glove. Instinctively, when they talked of Mr. Big, the black-gloved hand could not be forgotten. Mr. Big was responsible for it.

"How do you add it up?" Dark asked. He admired the way her bright, inquisitive mind worked.

Sharon began to tick off items on her slender fingers. "For some years Mayfield Aeronautics, a subsidiary of Quadrant, has been selling fighter planes to a certain Arab nation. Annual profits to Quadrant of tens of millions of dollars. Suddenly and without warning the ruler of that Arab nation turns over his order for planes to Crampton, a rival and competitor of Quadrant's. Not only will the future profits go to Crampton, but millions of dollars' worth of Quadrant planes are stacked up somewhere with no one to buy them. Not only is this a serious economic blow to Mr. Big but it does enormous damage to his image as one of the most powerful men in the world. He has been outwitted, outmaneuvered. As you say, he isn't going to take it lying down."

"So what does he do?" Dark asked, his fingers entwined in her gold-blonde hair. "Find another buyer for his planes?"

"Not good enough," Sharon said. "The loss of the money is the smallest part of the damage to Mr. Big."

"So what would you advise Mr. Big to do?" Dark asked. He smiled at her, the tender smile of the indulgent parent for a precocious child. He didn't feel at all parental toward her, but the image was one he couldn't avoid.

Sharon's eyes were very bright. "If I were Mr. Big," she said, "I would arrange for the overthrow of the government of that Arab nation. I would install my own people, and I would tell Crampton to go peddle its planes somewhere else."

Dark looked at her, his eyes widened behind the tinted glasses. "You'd overthrow a government?"

"Why not?" Sharon asked. "Corporations have done it before."

Dark shook his head slowly. "You know something, love? I'm awfully glad you're on my side," he said.

"The climate, at the moment," Maclyn said, "is highly moral."

Maclyn was in the State Department. On a trip to New York he had called his old friend Jason Dark and they were lunching together at Willard's Back Yard, a fancy restaurant in the East Fifties. Dark was having shad roe and bacon, and a green salad. Maclyn was having a baby Maine lobster with fried onion rings. Both items cost an arm-and-a-leg at Willard's Back Yard, but Willard helped take away the pain by preparing and cooking them magnificently.

The two men shared a bottle of Chablis. Dark had asked his friend Maclyn a question which had resulted in the comment about a highly moral climate.

"Watergate plus Senate investigations of the C.I.A. have made the overthrowing of foreign governments very unpopular," Maclyn said.

"A friend suggested to me," Dark said, "that the only way Quadrant International could recoup the loss of its airplane contracts with a certain Arab country was to overthrow the government and put in its own people."

"It certainly would be a way," Maclyn said cautiously. He worked on his last lobster claw with the skill of a surgeon. "But big corporations are walking very light these days, Jason. Overthrowing foreign governments would not be viewed with favor. As I say, the climate at the moment is highly moral."

"But how would Quadrant go about it if it decided to ignore the climate?"

"They would go about it in a way that would point somewhere else entirely."

"Simply buy a revolution?"

Maclyn frowned. "Not so simple in the Arab country you're talking about," he said. "Dissenters in that country are either in jail or dead. Quadrant would have to import an army, or at least a company of highly skilled terrorists, along with arms and ammunition."

"So?"

"Just now that would not be easy to do," Maclyn said. "Getting men and arms out of this country is very difficult. Getting them into the Arab country is even more difficult. You couldn't fly them in to a guarded airport. You couldn't take them in by ship and disembark them on guarded decks. Maybe a year from now, when the climate may have changed, when the Arab government feels safer and more relaxed . . ."

Maclyn sighed. "You know something, Jason? I could eat another lobster if I could afford it."

"Tell me how Quadrant can land an invading army and I'll buy you one," Dark said.

"If I agreed to such a deal I'd be cheating you," Maclyn said. "Because I don't know any way to do it."

At the very same time that Dark and Maclyn were lunching at Willard's Back Yard, two other men were lunching in a paneled office on the 43rd floor of a midtown office building. These two men were many times richer than Dark and Maclyn, but their luncheon consisted of two ham-on-rye sandwiches and two glasses of skimmed milk.

One of the men was a vice-president of Quadrant International. The other was the general manager of a firm called Worldwide Cargoes, Inc.

"I'm not very familiar with just how container cargoes work," Janway, the Quadrant man, said. As it happened he was thoroughly familiar with everything about Worldwide Cargoes, but he wanted Crimmins, their general manager, to put it into words for him. He was asking for what might have been called the 50-cent tour.

"We came into the business after Sea-Land had made a huge success of it," Crimmins said. "It's the most efficient way of transporting cargo from its point of origin to any place around the world."

He went on to explain. The cargo containers were large enough to fit onto a railroad flat car, or onto the chassis of a trailer truck.

They were constructed to fit into the holds and onto the decks of specially built ships. The container, packed at the factory, was carried by rail or truck to a terminal that had dock facilities. The cargo, carefully prepared, could then travel by land or sea without fear of contamination or moisture.

"This is for dry cargo, of course," Crimmins said. "We have containers for bulk liquid that will hold five thousand gallons each. We have containers for automobiles that will carry five standard-sized cars. We have open-top containers that will allow cranes to load bulky machinery. We have insulated containers that will keep the contents at a fixed temperature to avoid spoilage. And we have ventilated containers that permit fresh air to circulate around the cargo and expel any inherent heat or gases."

"Very interesting," Janway said. "Let me tell you my problem. We want to ship several thousand young fruit trees to the Middle East. They don't need watering or tending, but fresh air is essential. These ventilated containers you mention sound as if they might do the trick."

"How many containers would you need?" Crimmins asked.

"I'd guess one dozen would do it. They'd be shipped from the middle west—Idaho, as a matter of fact. Eventual destination—well, I'll tell you that later."

"Simple," Crimmins said. "By truck from your orchards to the nearest railhead. By flat car to our terminal on the other side of the Hudson River in New Jersey. From there by ship direct to destination. I could show you on a map if you like."

"I can visualize it, Mr. Crimmins," Janway said. His smile had a secret quality to it. "These ventilated containers sound like just the ticket. Could I—could I have one of my orchard men take a look at one, just to be sure?"

"Of course."

The secret smile widened. "Then I think we have a deal for moving our fruit trees, Mr. Crimmins."

Sharon Evans was lying on the big couch in Jason Dark's book-lined living room. Propped up on her elbows, she was reading the evening paper. Across the room Dark worked at his desk. He had a stack of notes and some folders in front of him. From time to time he turned to look at Sharon. She seemed to be psychic, because each time he looked at her she turned away from her paper to smile at him.

Dark forced himself back to his notes and folders.

Sharon turned a page of her newspaper.

"Oh, brother!" she said. "Good old kindly Quadrant International."

Dark turned his head. The desk lamp glittered against his tinted glasses. "I have a feeling you didn't read that line with sufficient irony," he said.

"You can say that again! How do you like this—and I quote: 'Quadrant International, one of the world's giant corporations, is shipping five thousand fruit trees to the Middle East where engineers are already irrigating an acreage in the desert. Quadrant, which supports many business enterprises in the Middle East, is preparing this orchard and donating the trees as a gesture of good will toward its Arab friends.'" Sharon laughed. "Good will my foot! I'll bet the Arabs are donating twice the value of those trees to kindly old Quadrant—as a gesture of good will!"

"Is there any more?" Dark asked. "Where are the trees coming from?"

Sharon held a forefinger on the page to keep her place. "Would you believe Idaho? They're being sent on something called a container ship. Red, white, and black containers, each one the size of a truck—according to the picture here."

Dark reached for the folders on his desk and selected one. "Worldwide Cargoes," he said. "A subsidiary of Quadrant. They carry the product in huge containers by truck, by rail, by sea, to any place in the world." He looked up at Sharon, the folder still open in front of him. "You remember, I told you I asked Maclyn how Quadrant could land an invading army in a certain Arab country?"

"Jason! You're not suggesting—?"

"A man and a fruit tree would occupy just about the same amount of space, wouldn't you say?"

"But—"

"I thought we both agreed that Mr. Big wouldn't wait for the climate to grow milder. Do you still have that boy friend who works for the public school system, love?"

"Ex-boy friend," Sharon said.

"Is he still with the school system?"

"Myron Kochak," Sharon said. "Yes, I think he's still where he was."

Dark leaned back in his chair, his eyes fixed on a top shelf of books. "Wouldn't it be marvelous if a group of children could be taken to Worldwide Cargoes' terminal on the New Jersey side?"

They've read about kindly old Quadrant sending five thousand fruit trees to help feed the starving Arabs in Worldwide's amazing freight containers. Good public relations for Worldwide, wouldn't you say, to let the school children get a glimpse of this wonderful new way of transporting freight? I'm sure Myron would take you along as a guest observer."

"And what would I observe?"

"Trees and armies—both have to breathe," Dark said. "There are acres and acres of these containers stacked at the terminal. It would be helpful to know exactly where the ventilated ones are located."

"How far do I go in persuading Myron to arrange this excursion?" Sharon asked, her eyes dancing.

"I hope no further than to bat your beautiful eyes at him, love."

"It would be inhuman to give him false hopes, Jason."

Dark's face had turned cold and hard. "It would be inhuman to let Mr. Big murder a thousand people in a foreign country for profit."

Four days later 50 school children, plus teachers, plus Mr. Myron Kochak, plus his guest observer, Miss Sharon Evans, were taken on a tour of Worldwide Cargoes' New Jersey terminal. Four days was about right, Dark thought. Because there would be containers of fruit trees there, and they would have come from Idaho. And now the containers would be photographed, and much public-relations benefit would accrue to Quadrant International and Worldwide Cargoes.

Sure enough, on that very day there was a newspaper feature about the trees. The containers that contained them would be hoisted by cranes onto a container ship the following day.

The guide who took the children and the teachers and Mr. Kochak and Miss Evans around the terminal was very happy to show them the very containers in which the trees were packed. The guide commented on how generous it was of Quadrant International to help feed the poor of the Arab country, and how lucky they were to have Worldwide Cargoes to transport them safely.

Miss Evans, the special observer, was just a silly girl, the guide thought. She asked how the trees would survive a ten-day ocean voyage without air. She said she understood that plants had to breathe.

"These are ventilated containers, Miss Evans," the guide said. "If you'll look around the top of each container you'll see the ventilators."

On the way back to Manhattan on the ferry Mr. Kochak asked Sharon if she'd have dinner with him that night.

"I'm sorry, Myron, but I can't tonight."

"Tomorrow, then?"

"I'm sorry, Myron. But some time soon."

"I hope you mean it," Myron said.

"I do, Myron. You were an angel to arrange this fascinating trip."

On the way uptown in a taxi Sharon drew a rough map of Worldwide's terminal, marking clearly the location of the ventilated containers.

It was a dark night, with an overhang of clouds blotting out the moon and the stars. But it was brighter than the brightest day at Worldwide Cargoes' terminal on the Jersey side of the Hudson. Brilliant floodlights illuminated the many acres of ground and the hundreds of huge red, white, and black cargo containers lined up like carefully drilled squads and companies of troops.

Around the perimeter was a high wire fence bearing carefully spaced warnings to the general public that the fence was electrified. There were entrance gates north and south of the terminal where the huge containers could be brought in by rail or truck and parked according to a mathematical plan. On the east side was the river, with dock space for three ocean-going container ships, docked parallel to the pier. Great steel cranes reached up like fingers pointing to the sky. A large collection of jeeps was parked near the south end, ready to tow the containers into new positions when necessary, or to the dock itself.

At the north end there was one small entrance marked EMPLOYEES ONLY. For an employee to enter he must produce a punch card which a guard at the entrance would match against computerized information. Inside the electrified fence an army of gray-uniformed guards wearing holstered guns and carrying rifles patrolled ceaselessly, around the border made by the fence, and in and out of the geometrically parked containers.

Worldwide Cargoes guaranteed absolute security for its customers' freight. Pilferage was impossible at this terminal. If proper precautions had been taken at the point of loading, Worldwide could make that guarantee stand up 100 percent. You might bribe a guard, but not an army of guards. None of the containers was loaded or even opened here at the terminal. They were simply hoisted onto the container ships and sent to the four corners of the globe.

Across from the employees' entrance at the north end of the terminal was a line of small buildings—a lunchroom, a newspaper and tobacco store, a clothing store where workmen could buy blue jeans, workshirts, gloves, and work shoes.

It was ten o'clock. Two or three employees were in the lunchroom taking a coffee break before their shift ended at midnight. One of them finished, paid for his coffee and cake, and walked out into the night. He was 50 yards from the employees' entrance, but the flood-lights turned everything bright far beyond that distance.

"Give you a light?" a voice at the man's elbow asked.

The man turned to find himself confronted by a stranger, a short square man wearing tinted wire-rimmed glasses. The man was holding out a cigarette lighter.

"You nuts?" the workman asked. "Can't you see I ain't smoking, buster?"

The man with the tinted glasses snapped his lighter on, but there was no flame. Instead a pale vapor was directed straight into the face, the eyes, and the nose of the workman.

The workman staggered back, a cry of alarm choked off in his throat. He toppled over backward and lay still. The man with the tinted glasses took a quick look around, grabbed the workman by the heels, and pulled him into an alley between the lunchroom and the newspaper store. He went quickly through the unconscious man's pockets, found his wallet, and in it his employees' punch card.

From a previously planted cache the man with the tinted glasses retrieved a pair of coveralls, put them over his suit, pulled the unconscious man's work cap down over his forehead, and picked up a heavy leather bag with a shoulder strap. He hesitated, then produced a light blanket from the bag and covered the unconscious man with it. His smile was one-sided.

"Sweet dreams, chum," he said.

The man with the bag had no problem at the entrance gate. The guard there was watching a small portable television set. The New York Mets were locked in an extra-inning game with the St. Louis Cardinals. The punch card met with no objections from the computer.

A few yards inside the gate, however, there was trouble. An armed guard in a gray uniform brought the man with the bag to a halt.

"What you got in that bag, Jack?" the guard asked.

"Tools," the man with the tinted glasses said. "I'm supposed to check out those ventilated containers that are carrying fruit trees

to the Middle East in the morning. Those ventilators got to be in first-class working order or the Arabs won't be eating any apples or pears next spring."

"Open up," the guard said.

The man with the tinted glasses opened his bag. It contained tools—wrenches, pliers, hammers, drills, and a metal gun for shooting plastic wood into crevices or cracks that needed repair. The guard checked every item.

"Seems okay," he said.

The man with the tinted glasses smiled at him. "You expecting to find a bomb?" he asked.

"How the hell can you tell these days?" the guard said. "Especially when it's got to do with Ay-rabs. The ventilator containers are over in Row B, Section One."

"I was told," the man said. He moved casually toward Row B, Section One.

The containers Dark was looking for were stacked side by side, like giant freight cars. And, as on a freight car, at each end of each container was a little iron ladder that led up to the roof. Dark, his tool bag hanging by the strap over his shoulder, climbed up onto the roof of the first container. The ventilators were neatly spaced about a foot below the roof.

Dark opened his bag and took out the metal gun made for shooting plastic wood into crevices and cracks. He aimed it at the first ventilator.

"What the hell are you doing?" a voice called out.

Dark's muscles tightened. The guard who had checked him out was standing just below.

"Just trying to blow out any dirt or anything else that might obstruct the flow of air," Dark said calmly.

"Oh—yeah," the guard said. He didn't know anything about ventilators. He would have known, however, that ventilators packed with plastic wood wouldn't permit any circulation of air at all.

Dark worked steadily, methodically, until it was almost midnight. He had succeeded in blocking all the ventilators on twelve containers. On his way out he joined the crowd of men going off that work shift. His guard acquaintance, standing near the gate, spotted him.

"Everything okay?" he asked.

"Everything is just dandy," Jason Dark said.

He followed the swirl of men toward the lunchroom, but at the

last moment he slipped into the alley between it and the newspaper store. His earlier acquaintance slept peacefully under the blanket. Dark took off his coveralls and deposited his work cap beside the unconscious man. He pulled off the gloves he had been wearing and left them beside the cap.

From the far end of the alley came the sound of a low whistle. Dark smiled and headed that way. Waiting at the far end was a car. Sitting behind the wheel was Maclyn, the man from the State Department. Dark got in beside him.

"How did it go?" Maclyn asked.

"Fine."

"Jason, if this is some kind of pipedream—"

"Did I ever smoke you a pipedream, Mac?"

"The place is swarming with F.B.I. and C.I.A. men. If it turns out you've made a wrong guess I'm up the you-know-what."

Dark's smile was dreamy. "When it becomes known that Mr. Big and Quadrant International were planning to ship assassins and murder weapons to overthrow a foreign government, *they* should be in major trouble, shouldn't they, Mac?"

"Major, you bet—but it better be the way you say!"

They sat and waited. An hour. Two hours. Maclyn chainsmoked, fumed, fretted. Dark sat with his head resting against the back of the seat, his eyes closed, completely relaxed. There began to be light in the East, the gray light of early dawn.

"Damn it, Jason, you were wrong!" Maclyn said, between clenched teeth. "You sold me a cockeyed theory. So help me, I'll—"

Dark reached out and touched Maclyn's arm. "Listen!" he said.

There was a rumbling sound, like someone pounding on metal, then like many people pounding on metal. Dark was reminded, absurdly, of a thunder sheet they had used backstage when he was involved in amateur theatricals in his youth.

"I think the fruit trees are yelling for air," Dark said. "Turn your army loose, Mac."

"My God!" Maclyn said.

"Men with a cause will die rather than reveal a plot," Dark said. "But paid mercenaries will always surrender when the danger is great—and talk."

In the next few hours the whole world would know, by way of radio, television, and satellite, that Quadrant International had planned a murderous coup. The Senate Committees, the United Nations, the governments of a dozen countries would be infuriated

and would clamor for action. Mr. Big was in for it in a big way.

An hour later, in broad daylight, Dark made a phone call.

"It worked," he said. "It worked just fine."

"Oh, Jason, I'm so glad," Sharon said. "Where are you?"

"Downtown."

"Well, hurry home, love," Sharon said.

"Will do," he said, quietly jubilant.

They were one step closer to Mr. Big.

Dixon Childs, diplomat extraordinary, was a big broad-shouldered man with iron-gray hair and an aristocratically boned face. He had a wide white smile which, if you were his enemy, could chill your blood. If you were his friend that smile could delude you into believing that you were his oldest, dearest, and closest friend. It was all play-acting to Dixon Childs. He always presented that aspect of himself that would best promote his cause, and his cause was Dixon Childs—a man destined, he hoped, for the Presidency of the United States of America.

The man sitting across from Childs in the diplomat's posh suite at the Beaumont Hotel in New York also had a cause. His cause had led him to come to Childs with a warning.

Childs gave this man his intermediate smile, the one that neither rejected nor embraced. It was tentative. It meant that he had not made a final judgment on his visitor. "I'm sorry, Mr. Dark," Childs said, "but I don't have time to listen to your spy-story fantasies."

"You must know better than I do, Mr. Childs, the enormous power of today's multinational corporations," Dark said, in a quiet voice. "Quadrant International is not going to let you accomplish your upcoming mission to Africa."

"Why?" Childs asked, his smile beginning to freeze. The smoke from an expensive cigar curled around his head.

"Because you are an honest man," Dark said.

"Oh, come, Mr. Dark, do you really think—?"

"They can't afford to let you expose the truth," Dark said. "The situation is simple enough. There is a revolution taking place in an African country, one of those we call a 'newly emerging nation.' We have been told that the Communists are supplying arms, munitions, and money to one side, threatening the peace of Southern Africa. It has only recently been hinted that we, the United States, have been supplying arms, munitions, and money to the other side. The

Congress is distressed. That is why you are headed for Africa, as a kind of roving ambassador from the Congress, to find out the truth.

"The Congress, Mr. Childs, doesn't want another Vietnam in Africa. What you will find is that Quadrant International has supplied the arms and munitions for our side to the tune of a hundred million dollars, maybe more. Quadrant will continue to grow richer and more powerful, shielded by politicians whose election campaigns Quadrant has financed. You can't be allowed to get the evidence that will prove this and expose the truth."

"Are you suggesting that Quadrant International will let out a contract on me, Mr. Dark? An attack on me would launch a full-scale investigation that would never let up till they came to the truth. Quadrant International may try to bluff me, befuddle me, use the wool-over-the-eyes department. But my physical safety—never." He flicked the ash from his cigar into a tray on the table.

"It won't come by way of a wild-eyed assassin with a smoking gun," Dark said. "I suggest you will die of a heart attack."

Childs laughed. "I just had a physical checkup. My doctor tells me I have the heart of a boy of twenty."

"Did he tell you you were immune to poison, Mr. Childs?"

"My dear Mr. Dark, you have been reading the newspaper accounts of covert actions by the C.I.A.—a powder sprinkled on a dictator's shoes that would make his beard drop out, poisoned chewing gum that will make his teeth fall out. The dream-ups of sick children. I get the feeling that Quadrant International is an obsession with you, Dark."

Dark hesitated. Then, with his left hand, he pulled up the right sleeve of his jacket, and the sleeve of his black knit turtlenecked shirt. What was revealed was a harness attached to the stump of his right arm, to which was fastened the plastic hand, covered by the black glove. A flicker of pity showed in Dixon Childs's eyes.

Dark rolled down the two sleeves and leaned back in his chair. He spoke in a flat toneless voice that was meant to hide any kind of emotion. "About a year and a half ago I was working on a case for a client," he said. "Along the way I stumbled on some information about Quadrant International. It was unrelated to the case I was working on. But I made some notes on Quadrant, and I taped two conversations I'd had with an informant. I put the notes and the tapes away in a safe place—in case they might be useful."

"One night I got a message from my informant asking me to meet him after hours in the kitchen of the restaurant where he worked.

He had something hot, the message said. I went to the restaurant. It was a setup. I was attacked by two men wearing ski masks. Where were my notes, they demanded. Where were my tapes? I knew if I told them I was a dead man."

Dark moistened lips that had gone dry. "They tied my right hand to the butcher's block. Then one of the men took the butcher's cleaver and brought the flat side down on my hand, breaking the bones."

"Good lord!" Childs said.

"It went on," Dark said, in his flat monotone, "until every bone in my hand was crushed. Then the man in the ski mask began to hack at the crushed hand with the blade edge of the cleaver until my hand was shredded." Dark drew a deep breath. "I screamed a lot. I have no pride about being stoical. Then, half conscious, I was dragged out into Central Park and left to bleed to death. A park policeman found me and saved my life. No one could save my hand."

Dark's eyes were narrowed slits behind his wire-rimmed glasses. "Yes, I do have an obsession about Quadrant International, Mr. Childs. I am going to destroy the man who ordered this!" He held up the black-gloved plastic hand. "The best way to destroy him is to destroy his empire. But along the way, when a decent man like yourself is in danger, I let myself be sidetracked to give a warning. You are to attend a banquet here in the Beaumont tonight at which you are to be the main speaker. Am I right?"

"Yes." Childs sounded a little shaken.

"I suggest that you will have a heart attack before you ever get to speak a word. I suggest that you find an excuse—ill health, whatever—not to attend."

"Impossible!"

"Then I suggest you eat nothing, drink nothing—and try prayer," Dark said.

Sharon came out of the kitchenette and ran to the front door as she heard Dark's key in the lock.

"You're still here," Dark said, as if he were witnessing a miracle.

"You silly goof!" she said. Her arms went around him and her lips found his.

She led him to one of the comfortable overstuffed armchairs, hurried into the kitchenette, and returned with a mug of steaming black coffee. She lit a cigarette and put it between his lips. Her cool fingers caressed his cheek.

"How did it go?" she asked.

Dark's eyes clouded. "He saw me, thanks to Bob Maclyn in the State Department. He turned on his charm for me. But he didn't buy it."

"Oh, Jason!"

"He's going to that banquet tonight, intending to make a speech. I swear, I don't think he'll ever get to it."

"It's insane, Jason. Weren't you able to convince him that from what you know—?"

"Men headed for the stars believe they are immortal," Dark said, a bitter edge to his voice. He lifted his black-gloved plastic hand. "This shook him a little, but not enough."

"What's to be done?" Sharon asked.

"Nobody believes in terror or violence until after it's happened," Dark said. "I will go to the banquet—as a waiter. I've arranged it with Jerry Dodd, the security man at the Beaumont. I can hope I will see something, be one half-step ahead of a murder."

Sharon's fingers ran through his sandy hair. "Do you have to run risks yourself, Jason? You've warned him. Isn't that enough? If Maclyn at the State Department believes you, can't he have Childs protected? Why must you involve yourself, expose yourself to danger?"

Dark sipped his coffee. "If Childs is eliminated it will be a victory for Quadrant. One of the ways I can get at their vitals is to prevent this victory, any victory."

"Doesn't Childs have any protection at all? Foreign diplomats are protected by the police, the F.B.I., the Secret Service. What about our own people? Aren't they protected?"

"Oh, Childs has a bodyguard," Dark said. "A former F.B.I. agent who is supposed to know all the ins and outs of protecting a man in public. But I'm afraid they are guarding against the obvious—some crackpot with a gun, a bomb planted in Childs's car. It will be much more subtle than that, because Quadrant won't want it to look like a murder. An obvious murder would produce too thorough an inquiry."

"I told Childs he would probably die of a heart attack. He tells me he has the heart of a boy of twenty. He simply doesn't believe it. It's too far out for him to swallow." Dark allowed himself a mirthless chuckle.

"But that's just the way it may come, through a swallow. In his food, in his wine."

"Then he's got to be made to see that!"

"I'll try to get Maclyn to work on him. The trouble is Maclyn only half believes me himself."

That conversation took place in the late morning.

Dark called Bob Maclyn, the half believer, in Washington. Dark was as grimly persuasive as he could be. Maclyn was flying up in the afternoon to attend the banquet. He agreed to meet with Dark and Childs at The Beaumont an hour before the dinner. They would have a final discussion about the possible danger. Meanwhile Maclyn agreed to call Childs and urge him to take the danger seriously.

"Do you know what the seating arrangements will be at the dinner?" Dark asked.

"Childs and I will be at the head table," Maclyn said, "along with some foreign dignitaries."

"Will you be sitting next to Childs?"

"Probably not. The foreign guests—"

"Could you arrange to sit next to him?"

"I suppose it could be managed without ruffling too many feathers," Maclyn said.

"Arrange it," Dark said.

Jason Dark had learned that in moments of pressure, the waiting time before a climax, a forty-minute nap could be relaxing and refreshing. After his talk with Maclyn, after a delicious luncheon prepared by Sharon, he went up to the second-floor bedroom and stretched out on the king-sized double bed. He was aware of the faint scent of Sharon's hair on the pillow. He fell asleep instantly—he had trained himself to sleep at any time the opportunity presented itself.

He awoke, aware that Sharon was sitting on the edge of the bed, gently stroking his cheek.

"There is a man named Max Griffin here to see you. He says he's Dixon Childs's bodyguard."

Dark sat up. "Good," he said. "Maybe Maclyn struck oil, persuaded Childs to pay attention."

Max Griffin was a type that Dark recognized. The late J. Edgar Hoover had issued precise instructions about the appearance of his agents. They wore conservative suits, white shirts, dark ties, and short haircuts. Most of them had cold expressionless eyes. Max Griffin's eyes looked like two newly minted dimes. He was tall, broad-shouldered, a powerful man physically.

"I'm sorry to have missed you when you called on Mr. Childs this morning," he said, when Dark joined him. His voice was level, impersonal. Unlike his employer, he made no effort to charm. Nor had his tailor made any particular effort to conceal the fact that he was carrying a gun in a shoulder holster under his left arm.

"I'm glad you stopped by," Dark said, gesturing toward a chair.

Griffin sat down, his cold eyes taking in the room. A photographic survey, Dark thought. Every detail in the room would be remembered if remembering ever proved to be necessary.

"Mr. Maclyn seems to think you're not a crackpot," Griffin said. "You've made a believer of him."

"But not of you or Childs?" Dark asked. He lit a cigarette, his eyes narrowed against the smoke.

"My job is to protect Childs," Griffin said. "I have to take any threat seriously; no matter how far-fetched."

"And my theory is far-fetched?"

Griffin shrugged. "You have no evidence."

Dark's lips tightened for a moment. "I was a cop for twenty-two years," he said. "I dealt with evidence all that time, Mr. Griffin. I found I was always dealing with crimes *after* they were committed. I retired from the force and became a private investigator so that I wouldn't have to deal with evidence that would make a case for a prosecutor. I was free to follow my intuition without waiting for solid evidence, hoping that way I could prevent crime, not solve it after the fact. I have an intuition about Childs. An attempt will be made to murder him tonight. I can't prove it, but I *know* it."

"Mr. Maclyn seems to think you're not a screwpot," Griffin said.

Dark's smile was thin. "Maclyn has had some experience with my intuitions." He didn't add "about Quadrant International."

"Let's take a look at the situation," Griffin said. "Childs is staying at the Beaumont. He won't have to leave the hotel to go to the banquet. He'll be taken to the dining room in a private elevator with only Maclyn and me with him. He won't be exposed to the public until he reaches the head table. Hotel security, under their man Dodd, will be spotted all around the room. Anybody who tries to pull a gun—"

"A waiter, standing right behind his chair?" Dark suggested.

"The waiters serving the head table are all long-time employees of the hotel, absolutely vouched for by Dodd. There is no outside help for this evening. Security, as far as a gunman is concerned, is as tight as it would be if we were protecting the President."

"It won't come that way," Dark said.

"You suggested poison in his food or wine," Griffin said. "It doesn't make sense, Dark. The food is served in the kitchen. A waiter brings in half a dozen plates at a time. There's no way for anyone to tell which plate will go to Mr. Childs. The staff has been warned. If anyone in the kitchen says that a particular plate is for Childs, the waiter will instantly report to Dodd. There is no way to tell in advance from which bottle the wine will be poured into Childs's glass. It just can't happen at the banquet."

"It will happen, unless we find a way to stop it," Dark said.

Griffin sounded impatient. "Someone will poison his food or wine after it's served? While he and Maclyn and I are watching?"

"I hope not," Dark said.

"I can assure you, Mr. Dark, it won't," Griffin said. "If you have any theory about some other way—?"

Dark shook his head slowly. "I wish I did."

"I think you can put your mind at rest," Griffin said. "Nothing is going to happen to Childs, with all due respect to your intuition."

At six o'clock that evening Jason Dark rang the doorbell of Dixon Childs's suite at the Beaumont Hotel. He was wearing a loose-fitting raincoat over a waiter's uniform, supplied to him by the hotel. Max Griffin opened the door and ushered him in. Dixon Childs and Maclyn received him. Both men were dressed in dinner jackets and black tie.

"You're still convinced there's danger, Mr. Dark?" Childs asked. He was smoking one of his expensive cigars.

"More than ever convinced," Dark said.

"Griffin has explained to you how complete the security is."

"I would like to make it even more complete," Dark said. He glanced at his friend Maclyn, who had looked 35 years old for the last 15 years. He was a smiling salesman for America all over the world.

"I'll buy you the best steak in New York, Bob," Dark said, "the best two steaks if you turn out to be that hungry—if you'll bypass the banquet."

Maclyn showed his surprise. "Why me, Jason? I'm not anyone's target."

"I don't mean to remove your elegant presence," Dark went on. "But whatever you are served, from soup to nuts, I want you to change plates with Mr. Childs—plates, cups, glasses—anything that

is to be eaten or drunk. And having changed, you will eat or drink nothing that was served to Mr. Childs. You can plead a stomach upset if anyone asks about it."

"And if they ask why I am changing plates with Dixon?"

"He likes his meat rarer or better done, whatever the case may be."

"Griffin assures me there is no way the food or drink can be tampered with," Childs said. "Isn't this all pretty childish, Mr. Dark?"

Dark ignored the question. He was looking intently at his friend Maclyn. "I've never misled you before, have I, Bob?" he asked. "Humor me."

A cloud of worry passed over Maclyn's face. "All right, Jason," he said. "We'll play musical plates for you." He forced a smile. "That steak is going to cost you."

There were about 200 people in the Beaumont's special banquet hall when Childs, Maclyn, and Max Griffin entered through a back door and made their way to the head table. There were beautifully dressed women and an army of men in tuxedos. As Childs appeared, the guests rose from their seats and applauded. He was the guest of honor.

Dark, anonymous to most of them in his waiter's uniform, was standing by a tallish wiry man, also in black tie, who was Jerry Dodd, head of the hotel security force. Dark knew him as a highly efficient operator who, like himself, played his hunches.

"I'll be hovering behind the head table," Dark said. "If you see anyone at all in that area who doesn't belong to your staff, signal me."

"I'll get him," Dodd said.

"Leave him to me," Dark said. "Because there is more to it than just catching him. He's going to have to talk, Jerry, and the way to make him talk may not be quite legal."

The dinner began. The steady hum of voices, the occasional bursts of laughter, rose over the background of a string quartet playing soft music on a stand at the rear of the room. It was a gay, elegant occasion.

Dark watched the byplay at the head table. Waiters served the food and poured the wine. On every occasion Childs and Maclyn exchanged plates and glasses. When Maclyn didn't eat, a waiter inquired solicitously. Maclyn made some excuse. A few yards away

Max Griffin watched intently, his right hand slipped under his dinner jacket toward the holstered gun he was wearing. Around the room Dark saw at least a dozen hotel-security people and half a dozen others whom he spotted as police. As promised, the security was tight.

The dinner progressed to dessert and coffee. It was at that point that a waiter made his way along the back of the head table, putting a cellophane-wrapped cigar, taken from a cedar box, beside each diner. From across the way Dark saw Jerry Dodd raise his arm in a signal.

All anyone saw was a short square waiter suddenly move up beside Dixon Childs, apparently to sweep crumbs away from the diplomat's place. In the process he awkwardly swept Childs's cigar onto the floor.

"That was very clumsy of me, sir," Dark said. And then in a tense whisper, "*Don't smoke any cigar, not even your own!*"

Childs looked startled but he managed to simply nod and go on with a conversation with a guest at his left.

Dark walked briskly out into the service area, down a corridor to a door marked SERVICE LOCKERS. He opened the door and went in. The waiter who had passed the cigars was standing by an open locker, hurriedly changing out of his waiter's uniform into street clothes. He turned, with a startled look, as Dark entered. Seeing another waiter he smiled a white-toothed smile and went on dressing.

"Cigar?" Dark asked cheerfully, holding out the cellophane-wrapped cigar he'd swept away from Childs's place.

"No, thank you very much," the man said.

"Oh, but I want you to try this one," Dark said. "It's the one you left at Mr. Childs's place. I notice a little mark on the wrapper, put there to make sure you didn't make a mistake."

"I don't know what you're talking about!" the man said, his eyes suddenly wide with fright.

"If you smoke this I'll know you are not a willing killer, even if it kills you," Dark said. "If you want to live, I suggest you tell me who hired you for the job."

"No! Please—"

The locker-room door opened and Dark, turning his head, saw Max Griffin. The big bodyguard had drawn his gun and it was aimed in the general direction of Dark and the waiter.

"Go!" Griffin said. "Get out of here fast!"

The waiter gave a little cry of relief and ran.

"And now, Mr. Dark, you will hand over that cigar," Griffin said.
"It's evidence," Dark said.

"I don't want to have to kill you here," Griffin said, "but if you don't hand over that cigar—"

"You will take me somewhere else and kill me, is that it?"

"Hands against the wall. Spread your legs," Griffin ordered. He was very close. A child couldn't miss at that distance.

Dark turned, raised his hands and placed them against the wall. He was holding the cigar in his left hand, the good hand. He spread his legs, and Griffin gave him a very professional frisking. Then the cigar was snatched out of Dark's hand.

"You can turn around now," Griffin said.

Dark turned, his hands still raised above his head. Griffin's mouth was twisted in a grim smile.

"Didn't your intuition tell you that you wouldn't be allowed to interfere in this situation, Dark?" he asked.

"My intuition told me to expect you," Dark said. "May I lower my hands?"

"Go ahead."

Dark lowered his left hand, slowly, but his right, the one in the black glove, moved like lightning. It caught Griffin on his gun arm and there was a sound like splintering wood. Griffin screamed, staggered back, the gun slithering away across the floor. The black-gloved hand rose and came down again on Griffin's head. The body-guard spun around and fell flat on his face on the cement floor.

Dark, breathing hard, stood quite still, looking at him. Then he bent down and took the cellophane-wrapped cigar out of Griffin's pocket.

At that moment the door burst open and Jerry Dodd, the hotel-security man, charged in, gun drawn.

"Did you get that waiter?" Dark asked.

"Got him," Dodd said. He knelt down beside Griffin. Then he looked up at Dark. "For God's sake, what did you hit him with? He's out cold."

Dark moved over toward a locker and opened it. Inside was his raincoat. He pulled up his right sleeve and began to unfasten the black-gloved hand from the harness on his forearm.

"When this happened to me," he said, "I had wild, hysterical ideas at first. They had done this to me, and I would turn it into a weapon to use against someone, I thought. I had a duplicate hand made, one

of cast-iron. It seemed childish later on, but tonight I thought it might come in handy."

He reached in the pocket of his raincoat and replaced the iron hand with the lightweight plastic one he normally wore.

"I realize," Maclyn said, as Dark let him into the 40th Street apartment, "that you want to change out of that waiter's suit before you take me to eat somewhere. But I warn you, I'm starving—for food and for facts."

"Patience," Dark said. He raised his head, like an old hound sniffing the breeze for a trail. Then he smiled. "The time has come."

It was then that Maclyn noticed a table for two set by the windows. It was then that a lovely blonde girl came out of the kitchenette carrying a huge sizzling steak on a silver platter. It was then that Maclyn saw the salad in a wooden bowl, the loaf of French bread, the champagne in an ice bucket.

"You want the facts before you eat?" Dark asked.

Dark crossed to the table, stopping on the way to kiss Sharon's cheek. "Intuition," he said to Maclyn. "I began to suspect Griffin from the start. He wanted me to tell him what was going to happen. He never suggested any possibilities himself. I had the feeling that as he listened to me he was pleased. I hadn't mentioned the method for getting Childs that was planned. He knew—he thought he knew—exactly what we were guarding against. All that mumbo-jumbo about changing plates convinced him that's what we were watching for. Behind the scenes, which Griffin could see, Dodd was having the plates and drinks intended for Childs whisked away. I let it slip we had a chemist waiting to check everything. Our Mr. Griffin was Cheshire-cat happy."

"And then the waiter with the cigars appeared," Maclyn said.

Dark nodded. "The cigar, as a method, had occurred to me early. I'd noticed that Childs was a heavy smoker of expensive cigars. The poisoned cigar is an old C.I.A. trick, according to the media."

"But it could have been so much simpler," Maclyn said. "A poisoned cigar slipped into his own humidor."

"I think not," Dark said. "An autopsy might reveal how he died, and then the people close to Childs would all be suspect, including our Mr. Griffin. At the banquet there would be a couple of hundred suspects, the least of them Max Griffin, Childs's own bodyguard."

"It will be a long time before Griffin will be able to talk," Maclyn said. "You really did him in."

Dark smiled. "The velvet hand in the iron glove."

Jason Dark had known fear many times in his life. He had never felt that fear and courage were incompatible. You knew fear, but you had the courage to cope with it. A man without fear was a man without imagination. Dark knew when there was danger around him, when you had to be afraid of it. He also knew exactly what his capabilities were for facing that danger. Never, until this morning, had he felt that the odds were worse than fifty-fifty against his surviving. This morning Dark was afraid of Youth.

He sat with his back to the windows of the living room in his East 40th Street duplex apartment, his plastic right hand covered by a black glove buried in his jacket pocket. He was studying his visitor—and he knew fear.

Alex Clement had been sent to him by a trusted friend as a foreign correspondent for *Network News* who "may be able to lead you to a path you've been trying to find." From the moment Clement had walked into the apartment, however, Dark had felt a jolt of fear induced by a situation he knew he wasn't equipped to battle.

He couldn't fight Youth. He couldn't fight what he had to describe as a kind of male beauty. He couldn't fight a sparkling charm. The instant contact this young man made with the girl who opened the front door to him was like the excitement of the hunter who spots game—the response of youth to youth without any words being spoken. These were dangers Jason Dark knew he couldn't evade and wasn't equipped to fight.

All his life until a year ago Jason Dark had been a loner. There had been women in his life, but none who mattered. And then Sharon Evans, blonde, lovely, in her mid-twenties, had found herself in the middle of one of Dark's adventures—and found herself in love with this gentle-tough older man. He wanted her so much and yet he argued fiercely against any sort of permanent relationship. "I'm old enough to be your father! My life is no kind of life for you."

But she had replied, "Life without you is no kind of life for me."

One night he came home and there she was. She had moved into his apartment, bag and baggage. His life was turned around. There were things in this relationship he hadn't imagined existed. Two people seemed to become one. Deep inside him Dark knew it couldn't last forever. Some day someone more nearly the right age for Sharon,

with her kind of glorious vitality, would appear on the scene and that would be that. He should be thankful for all he had had, he told himself, but the thought of losing her was the most excruciating fear he had ever known.

When Alex Clement stepped into the apartment this morning, Dark felt his heart jam against his ribs. With nothing tangible to base it on, instinct told him that this was it.

Clement, knowing nothing of the relationship, assumed that Sharon was a daughter, or a secretary. The thought that she might be an old man's love, an old man's world, never occurred to him. That was the way Dark saw it. Twenty-five or twenty-six, Dark thought—just about Sharon's age.

"Thank you for seeing me," Clement said to Dark, but his eyes were on Sharon as she brought coffee from the kitchen.

"Bob Maclyn is an old friend," Dark said. It was Maclyn, in the State Department in Washington, who had suggested he see Clement. *He may be able to lead you to a path you've been trying to find.*

He may be able to turn my life into something bitter and empty, Dark thought.

"I have been stationed in the Middle East for *Network News* for the last ten months," Clement said. He watched Sharon move over to the window seat just to the right of Dark. She was smiling at Clement. Was it the polite smile of a hostess, or was something electric passing between them?

"You and I, unaware of each other, have been working along the same line, so Maclyn tells me," Clement said. "Quadrant International."

Quadrant International was one of the biggest of the multinational corporations, bigger than any three Middle East countries put together—dealers in tanks, guns, planes, pharmaceuticals, computers, suppliers of technical experts and expertise. Jason Dark, on a case unrelated to Quadrant, had come across an informer who talked of the bribery of foreign government officials, the corruption of local politicians by Quadrant.

Dark had made tapes of the informer's stories and stored them away for future use. Then he had been trapped in the kitchen of a restaurant in the city where his informer had set him up. Two men in ski masks had strapped his hand to the butcher's block, demanding the tapes. They had crushed and then chopped his hand to pieces. He had managed, in his agony, to keep the hiding place of the tapes secret, because he knew he would die if he revealed it.

Since then Dark's one goal was to find the man who had ordered his torture and to destroy his empire, Quadrant International.

"Maclyn told me the story of your hand," Clement went on. His eyes moved toward the pocket where Dark's black-gloved plastic hand was buried. There was curiosity, not sympathy, in the look. "You have reason to believe that the men who did this to you were hired by Quadrant. Maclyn says you had some documents or tapes they wanted."

Dark nodded. Maclyn had done a lot of talking to this young man. The State Department man must trust him completely to have told him so much.

"You couldn't identify those men if you confronted them again?"

"They wore ski masks and gloves," Dark said. "No uncovered flesh."

"My assignment in the Middle East was an in-depth study of terror and terrorists," Clement continued. He seemed to be addressing what he had to say to Sharon, not Dark. Trying to impress her, Dark thought. "We are living in a time when hijacking, kidnaping, the mass murder of innocent people—like the slaughter of Israel's Olympic team at Munich—is a way of life. Holding hostages for political gain is move one between governments, between governments and corporate entities. An endless battle for power with human life having little or no value. Your friends in the ski masks didn't kill you because they think your terror will be so great the next time that you'll give them what they want."

"The next time!" Sharon's voice was a frightened whisper.

"There will be a next time," Clement said. "The name of the game is to get what you want—by any means."

Dark produced a cigarette with his left hand, put it between his lips, lit it with a lighter held in his left hand. He had become expert with that left hand over the months.

"I have been aware of that," Dark said. "I have been trying to get to them before they get to me."

"But why have they waited eighteen months to strike at you again, Jason?" Sharon asked.

"May I guess at the answer?" Clement asked, giving her his brightest smile. "Whatever Mr. Dark has is not dangerous to them right now. It probably will be dangerous to them when they make some move in the future. They tried to get it early. Failing, they attracted attention to themselves. Too many people know about Mr. Dark's war against Quadrant. To destroy him now would result in

too many questions being asked. But sometime—maybe tomorrow, maybe six months from now—they will have to get what they want or risk a failure they can't afford."

"You haven't told me anything I don't know, Mr. Clement," Dark said. "I have been living on borrowed time." He glanced at Sharon. "I know that. Maclyn indicated you could give me some concrete help. Lead me to a path I've been looking for—that's the way he put it."

Clement took a little cigarette-sized cigar from a flat box in his pocket and tapped it on the back of his hand. "Trademarks, Mr. Dark," he said. "I kept thinking about what has happened to you while I was talking to Bob Maclyn. Terrorists in the Third World have a way of dealing with their enemies—and their own people who turn to private crime. A murderer is murdered in exactly the same fashion that he did his own killing—a bullet if he shot someone, a knife if he knifed someone, a garroting if he strangled someone. A thief—his hand is cut off."

Clement held a lighter to his little cigar. "In their eyes you are a thief, Mr. Dark. You stole information from them. I can think of a dozen better ways to make you talk than hacking off your hand. But if I were controlled by ancient traditions I would automatically think of the accepted way my ancestors had for dealing with a thief."

"But Jason was attacked here, in New York City, in America!" Sharon said.

"The assassins, the hijackers, the torturers and kidnapers come from all over the world," Clement said. "You want a man wiped out in the airport at Jerusalem, you hire a hit man from Japan. You want a British diplomat eliminated in London, you import your killer from Spain. If the killer is caught he has no record, no traceable connections in the country where he's working. An outfit like Quadrant can reach out to find a hit man anywhere in the world. They chose men from the Middle East to work on you here in New York, Mr. Dark. What they did to your hand proves that to me—the Third World punishment for a thief."

Dark fought with impatience. He wanted to put an end to what he sensed was a special exchange between this handsome young man and Sharon. "It's an interesting theory," he said, "but it isn't any real help to me."

"But if you knew where to look?" Clement smiled at Sharon. He was, Dark thought with a touch of anger, showing Sharon how clever he was. "Three days ago," Clement went on, "I was strolling down

Fifth Avenue when I saw a man I knew from another time, another place. This man, a Palestinian, had performed some violent acts for Quadrant in the Middle East. He is a murderer, a torturer, an expert at sophisticated violence."

"So you went to the police?" Sharon asked.

Clement shook his head. "No proof, no solid evidence. If I went to the police I'd probably be murdered in my bed before the next sunrise. But I was curious, so I followed this man."

"He has a name?" Dark asked.

"He probably has a dozen names," Clement said. "In the Middle East I heard him referred to simply as The Man. A genius in the art of violence. As I say, I followed him. He went to a small renovated brownstone on East 63rd Street. I saw other dark-skinned Moslem types come and go from that house. Not strange there, you understand. That part of the city has stopped being curious about foreign types. The United Nations. But here, I thought, is a little nest of violent men."

"With no reason to think they had anything to do with this," Dark said. For the first time he took the black-gloved plastic hand out of his pocket and rested it on the table.

"I made some discreet inquiries," Clement said. "I learned that the owner of that brownstone is Richard Harkness of Harkness Chemical."

Dark felt his stomach muscles tighten. Harkness Chemical, he knew, was a subsidiary of Quadrant International. Clement might have something.

"I still don't understand why you haven't gone to the police," Sharon said.

Clement gave her a charming if slightly patronizing smile. "In my business you keep alive on tips, on secret sources of information. Let it become known that you will pass what you know to the police or other law-enforcement agencies and you are done for. I badly want to know what cooks in that house on 63rd Street, but I can't go to the police. It occurred to me that Mr. Dark might run risks I can't afford to run. It occurred to me that by doing him a favor he might, in turn, do me a favor."

"Such as?"

"An exclusive account of what you discover on 63rd Street."

"And if I refuse?"

Clement shrugged, smiling. "A gamble I'm taking," he said.

Dark looked down at his black-gloved hand. The man responsible

for it might now be within reach. He would owe something if that turned out to be true.

"I can reach you, I suppose, at the offices of *Network News*," he said.

"I'm staying in a friend's apartment," Clement said. "Trying to put ten months of work into some kind of readable order. I can give you a phone number in case you need to call me."

Clement wrote down a number on a slip of paper Sharon supplied. He also wrote down the exact address of the house on 63rd Street. At the door he smiled down at Sharon who had followed him there.

"May I call you sometime?" he asked.

"If you think it's worthwhile," she said.

Dark sat still, staring down at his hand, as the door closed on his visitor. And then she was beside him, her arms around him, her cheek pressed against his.

"You idiot!" she said. She laughed. "Do you really think I could be interested in that brash young clown? Oh, Jason, my darling, you surprise me. I had thought you were quite grown up."

He held her close, and his world started to come together again.

There is a vast difference between a routine, fact-gathering, note-taking detective and the genuinely great crime hunters and crime breakers. The difference, Jason Dark knew, was an intangible thing, an instinct, a built-in alarm system, a kind of personal radar. He remembered as a child reading about some hero whose faithful horse refused, even when subjected to whip and spur, to cross a bridge. Seconds later the bridge collapsed into a raging torrent that would have killed both rider and mount. Instinct? Some kind of psychic alarm system? Once in his career Dark had ignored the warning that came to him from his own special instinct for danger. It had cost him his right hand.

Dark had heard men say they had "a hunch" about a situation. They were, he thought, the kind of men who draw to an inside straight at poker and go broke. It wasn't just a hunch he had about the house on 63rd Street. He was inundated by private warnings.

There was nothing noteworthy about the house, an old-fashioned brownstone, except something lifeless about it that Dark couldn't quite define. Venetian blinds were drawn over the windows facing the street, presumably to guard against the bright afternoon winter sun. Clement had seen men come and go from the house, but after two hours of watching, Dark had seen no one. If the people who

lived theré were involved with the United Nations, the place could be deserted until the afternoon sessions at the world organization were finished. It would be an ideal time to let himself into the house and have a look around, but the inner warnings against such a move were almost physically painful. Years ago, until he had learned to trust those feelings, Dark had thought he was afraid. He knew better now. Something was wrong.

New York City is a repository for millions of tons of records, files, special information. If you knew the right place to go, the right person to ask, you could find out almost anything that was important to you. After watching the house from various places along the block, after going around to the rear and coming up a back alley without seeing any signs of life, Dark decided to make sure of his facts. He called a friend who worked in one of the offices that handled city records.

Clement had been right. The house on 63rd Street belonged to Richard Harkness of Harkness Chemical. The connection with Quadrant International was there—it was real. He had mistrusted Clement because he was jealous of his youth, his handsome face. For once he had allowed his instinct to be fouled up by the fear of losing Sharon. She was right. He'd reacted like an adolescent.

But something more than instinct was involved in his reluctance to proceed. Experience told him that things that came easy must be examined closely. Clement had pointed out a place to him which was almost certainly used by terrorists hired by Quadrant. All he had to do was choose the right moment to walk in and catch them red-handed, perhaps the very men who had maimed him a year and a half ago. He wanted so urgently to square that account; he could taste the moment of revenge. And yet both instinct and common sense warned him off. Wait—wait for some sign of life!

Almost directly across the street from the house was a little fruit and grocery store. *GARDELLA'S*, the sign read. He had seen school children and workmen enter and leave. Gardella's made sandwiches and sold fruit, cheese, and pasta products. Dark went into the store. A dark-skinned little man, probably Gardella, smiled at him. Dark selected a McIntosh apple and asked for a piece of Vermont cheese he saw displayed.

"That house across the way, number 123, is it occupied?" Dark asked.

Gardella shrugged. "Sometimes," he said. "I think people from the U.N. use it. Years ago a family lived there, but no more."

"I wondered if it might be for rent or sale," Dark said.

"I don't know," Gardella said. He scowled at the building. "I see people come and go, but they don't shop in the neighborhood."

"Recently?" Dark asked.

"How's that?"

"You've seen people come and go recently?"

"Sure. Last night I see men—three or four—go in."

"And you saw them come out?"

Gardella shook his head. "But I don't watch all the time when I'm busy."

Dark reached in his left-hand jacket pocket for a cigarette. "Damn!" he said. "I forgot that my lighter is empty. I'll buy a tin of lighter fluid from you, Mr. Gardella. Might as well make it a large one. I'll be taking it home."

Winter darkness came a little after five. There were lights everywhere except in the Harkness house. Jason, his topcoat collar turned up, went around the block and came up the alley in the rear. On his first trip he had seen two large metal trash cans filled with torn papers. He had noted there was no food garbage, only paper. He took out of his pocket the can of lighter fluid he'd bought at Gardella's and doused the contents of both cans. His lighter, working perfectly, started two fires. He called in a fire alarm, then walked quickly around to the front again. Others had seen the flames and smoke and people were gathering outside the house. If there was anyone inside they would surely emerge now.

Fire equipment came barreling down the street. People shouted at the firemen, indicating that the fire was in the back yard. Jason waited for someone to come out of the house. No one did.

A fireman came out of the alley. "Seems to be in the garbage cans," he said. "But we'll have a look inside, just to be sure."

The words were hardly out of the man's mouth when there was a thunderous explosion from the back of the house, the sound of shattering glass, and someone screaming.

A fireman, his face cut and bleeding from broken glass, came staggering up the alley.

"Whole damn place blew up when we got the back door open," he said. "Couple of guys blown to hell and gone. Oh, God! Must have been a gas leak or something."

Jason Dark walked away, his blood like ice in his veins. His instinct had been correct. The place had been booby trapped for him. Two men had died in his place . . .

It was a little after midnight, hours after the explosion on 63rd Street. Jason Dark stood outside the door of an apartment on the tenth floor of a modern residence building in midtown. He had rung the doorbell and was waiting, his hands jammed deep in his overcoat pockets.

The apartment door opened and handsome young Alex Clement faced his visitor, a look of almost comic surprise on his face. Clement was wearing an overcoat, and Dark saw a suitcase standing just inside the door. It appeared the young man was just leaving.

"Man, am I glad to see you!" Clement said.

"Glad?" Dark stood quite still, his face an expressionless mask.

"It's been all over TV and radio," Clement said. "The house on 63rd Street. There's been an explosion of some sort. Did you know? Two firemen were killed."

"I know. I was there," Dark said.

"Well, come in, for God's sake," Clement said, opening the door wide. "I was concerned. I was afraid you might have been in the building. I half expected to hear they'd found a third body. They say it may have been a gas leak, set off by a fire that started in some trash cans outside the building. Come in."

Dark stepped through the doorway into a small undistinguished apartment. His hands were still in his pockets.

"They 'say' it may have been a gas leak, but they know it wasn't. It was a carefully planted booby trap. Two of them. Anyone who opened the front or back door was a dead man."

"Good lord!" Clement said.

"You were going somewhere?" Dark said.

"My friend, whose apartment this is, is coming home unexpectedly. I was about to find myself a hotel room somewhere. I have the makings of a drink if you'd like one."

"Thanks, no," Dark said. "But make one for yourself. It may be a long time before you have another one."

Clement's eyes narrowed. "I don't follow."

"I'm about to take you in on a murder charge," Dark said, "or at least as an accessory to the murder of two firemen."

"You have to be kidding!" Clement said.

Dark took his left hand out of his pocket. In it he held a small photograph. It was of a dark young man standing by a fountain in some foreign city.

"Recognize this man?" Dark asked.

Clement frowned and shook his head. "I don't know him," he said.

Then the corners of his mouth moved in a small bitter smile. "Maybe I can guess, though."

"Who better than you?" Dark said. "The man in the picture is, of course, Alex Clement of *Network News*. The photo was taken in Beirut last month."

The handsome young man turned away toward a portable bar in the corner of the room. It seemed he needed that drink.

Dark returned the picture to his pocket. "It took me some time to track it all down," he said. "After the explosion I knew you'd set me up. It was totally out of key for Alex Clement, an established and reputable reporter. Oh, I realized Clement might have been bought by Quadrant, but I had to be sure. I checked with *Network News* and this snapshot was the result. I checked with my friend Maclyn in the State Department. It turned out he didn't know Clement personally. When you called him on the phone and told him you were Clement, he passed you on to me. All you had to do was to persuade me to go into that house on 63rd Street to look for my torturers and you would have done the job you were paid to do—set me up for death."

The young man at the bar poured himself a drink. "Why didn't you go into the house?" He didn't seem at all concerned, only curious.

"Something smelled suspicious about it," Dark said. "Some instinct warned me. I thought your terrorists might be waiting inside for me. So I set the fires in the trash cans, thinking I'd smoke them out. I called the fire department and, indirectly, caused the death of two men. You're going to pay the price for that, my friend."

"I rather doubt it," the young man said. He swallowed half of the drink he'd poured.

Dark's left hand came out of his pocket again and this time it held an efficient-looking handgun. "I'd like nothing better than to have the excuse to spatter your brains right here on the carpet," he said.

"That could be the greatest mistake of your life," the young man said, and finished his drink. He was suddenly quite businesslike. "Things don't always work the way we plan them," he said. "But Quadrant always covers its people. I think I'm going to walk out of here and that you'll make no attempt to stop me."

"Try," Dark said, his voice flat.

"First, I suggest you call your apartment and talk to your Miss Sharon Evans," the young man said. "Or rather, try to talk to her. She isn't there, you see."

Dark didn't speak. His finger was tight on the gun's trigger.

"Some hours ago, just in case," the young man said, "your Sharon Evans was taken into custody. If you have any hope of seeing her again, you will stand aside and let me go. In a couple of days, when I am safely away, you will receive instructions as to how you may be able to get her back." The bright smile that he was afraid had charmed Sharon lit up the young man's face again. "I do hope, for her sake, your instinct tells you I'm not bluffing."

"If she has been harmed—" Dark said, his voice unsteady.

The young man walked calmly over to his suitcase and picked it up. "A piece of advice, Mr. Dark, because I suspect you are, at heart, a decent guy and I know you are a better than good investigator. You have been working for months to find the man at the top at Quadrant who gave orders to have you crippled. That's horse-and-buggy thinking. There is no one man at Quadrant who controls the show. Knock off one top man and another slips immediately into his place. You're fighting a system, Mr. Dark, not a man. You haven't got a chance, you know. But you just might get your girl back if you do what they want you to do." The young man made for the door. "See you around," he said.

Dark aimed his gun steadily, then slowly lowered it. They had him, he knew. They had him cold.

Months ago, when what Jason Dark called "the miracle of Sharon" took place, he had become aware that a new vulnerability had been added to his situation. For 22 years as a cop and more than five years as a private investigator, Dark had been a loner. It was an advantage for a man who insisted on projecting himself into the center of a violent world. He could remember wondering about other cops when he was on the force. He could recall tense moments he had shared with another man, a partner who was married and had a couple of kids. Would that man hesitate in a crisis, concerned about the future of his family without him?

Any judgments, any decisions that Jason Dark made down the years, had involved no one but himself. Risks were his to run without concern for anyone else. Then Sharon Evans had come into his life. He was loved and he loved. Now this thing that was so precious to him was being used against him, could destroy him.

He didn't care about himself. It was the terrible danger to Sharon that left him immobilized, sick with anxiety. Sharon, in the hands of Quadrant's people, was a weapon he couldn't match.

Or could he? . . .

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"I have lost the ability to think straight," Dark said to his friend.

The friend was sitting behind a Florentine desk in a plush office on the second floor of the Hotel Beaumont, New York City's top luxury hotel.

His name was Pierre Chambrun, and he was the legendary manager of the Beaumont. He was perhaps a year or two older than Jason, elegantly tailored, with very bright black eyes almost buried in deep pouches.

An original Picasso of the Blue Period was on the wall opposite his desk; the oriental rug on the floor was a gift from a Middle Eastern potentate. Pierre Chambrun dealt in luxury and he lived in luxury. There were people who had known him 35 years ago in a different frame of reference. As a young man Chambrun had been a flamboyant hero in the French Resistance, fighting the Nazis who occupied his beloved Paris.

Chambrun knew the worlds of luxury and violence equally well. He saw people from both worlds pass through his hotel every day. The Beaumont was the home-away-from-home for politicians, diplomats, and lobbyists whose center of interest was the United Nations.

Chambrun listened to Dark's story, the smoke from one of his flat-shaped Egyptian cigarettes curling around his head.

"You have two choices," he said to Dark. "You give in to their demands, which will certainly be that you turn over to them the tapes and notes you have. You can hope that for that they will return your lady unharmed."

"Hope?"

Chambrun shrugged. "Why should they return Miss Evans? They can keep you out of business forever by holding onto her. Further than that, once they have your tapes and notes you no longer have any life insurance for yourself. You are alive, Jason, because you have something they need. Once you turn it over to them they can safely do away with the nuisance that is Jason Dark forever. They may turn your lady loose, but she will have no one to come back to."

Dark moistened dry lips. "And my second choice?"

"Fight," Chambrun said, his voice harsh and hard.

"And risk Sharon's life?"

"Whatever you do that's a risk you have to run."

Dark was silent for a few moments, and he was aware of compassion in his friend's eyes. "I have dreamed for a long time," he

said, "that I—all alone—could somehow smash Quadrant International. I have nit-picked at them, I have snapped at their heels like an aggressive fox terrier. But the dream of total victory was infantile—I realize that now."

Chambrun put out his cigarette in the brass ashtray on his desk. "Perhaps not," he said. "Not unless you are squeamish about fighting criminals in a criminal fashion."

"An eye for an eye?" Dark asked.

"A blackmail for a blackmail," Chambrun said. "How good is the evidence you have—these tapes, these notes?"

"Enough to embarrass them," Dark said. "Not good enough to sink them."

"Then we will have to find something that will sink them."

"We?"

Chambrun smiled at his friend. "You came to me for help, didn't you, Jason?"

Chambrun had poured two cups of Turkish coffee which he brewed in a samovar on the sideboard in a corner of his office. He sipped his with relish. Dark tasted and put his cup aside.

"To win a fight with a powerful enemy you have to know every detail of what makes him tick," Chambrun said. "Every habit, every technique, every move and countermove he will make automatically. At the same time you must make that enemy think you are capable of things of which you may not be."

"For example."

"Would you kill a man to get Sharon Evans back?" Chambrun asked.

"Yes," Dark said without hesitation. "If I was sure it would get her back."

Chambrun shook his head. "You must convince them that there are no 'ifs'."

"And whom do I kill?" Dark asked.

"You make them think you will kill a man," Chambrun said, "but what you really mean to kill is a system. The system that is called Quadrant International."

"In two days?"

"In two days—if you have the guts for it," Chambrun said. "The world is sick with violence and treachery and blackmail and terror. There are the fanatics who will die for a cause, like the Kamakazi pilots of Japan who dove into the smokestack of a battleship to sink

it, destroying themselves at the same time. Fanatics are hard to fight. The Nazis found that out in Paris long ago. But your Quadrant International people are not fanatics in the true sense. Their aims are money and power. They won't die to get them. They want to live to enjoy them. That is how they differ from the fanatic."

"So what good does it do me to know that?" Dark asked.

Chambrun sipped his coffee. "If you were tortured to reveal secrets that would endanger your country, would you talk?" Chambrun glanced at Dark's black-gloved hand. "I think we know you wouldn't. But if all you had to save was money, would you give up your life for it? After all, you wouldn't be able to spend it then, would you?" Chambrun's smile was wry. "You might also be afraid to die because you would have to face your God with all your guilts."

"It's an interesting lecture," Dark said, "but where does it get me?"

"You are fighting men who will not willingly die for what they want," Chambrun said. "That gives you an advantage because we know that you would die for what you want, the safety of your woman. That gives you a slight edge over your opponent as you face each other."

Chambrun raised his hand to silence an interruption. "Yes, an edge—no matter how big and powerful and rich he may be, you have the edge of the fanatic. You will go all the way—which means giving up your life—to win. He will spend all the money necessary, corrupt all the decent men necessary, put his competition out of business, bribe, steal, betray to win. But he will not give up his life, Jason, because that would make his victory meaningless. So I repeat, to start with you have an edge."

"That's comforting to know," Dark said. He sounded bitter. "But do you have any idea how I can use that edge?"

Chambrun grinned at him, an almost boyish grin. "Of course I do, or why would I bring it up?"

Guests of the Beaumont Hôtel might have been disturbed if they knew how much the management knew about them when they signed in for a stay. Every morning a card passed across Chambrun's desk on which was the name of a newly registered guest. On it were letter symbols like A for alcoholic, WC for woman chaser, XX for a man double-crossing his wife, and WXX for a woman double-crossing her husband. There would also be a credit reference. At the Beaumont's prices, they had to be sure a guest could pay for what

he was contracting for. Hotel Security referred to these cards, preparing themselves for any intervention that might be necessary.

There was another symbol which was simply PC. That meant that Pierre Chambrun had special information about the guest which he kept to himself. If Chambrun had been a criminal, he could have run the greatest blackmail factory in the United States. He knew more about many of his guests than the State Department, the F.B.I., or the C.I.A. might have been expected to know. He used what he had to protect the hotel from scandal, from violence, from anything that would disrupt its Swiss-watch efficiency. The Beaumont was Chambrun's world, and he guarded it jealously.

On this day he did an unheard-of thing, something he had never done before in his long career as manager of the Beaumont. He made available to an outsider some secret PC information about a guest. After all, a girl's life was at stake.

"There is a man staying in my hotel who may be the key to your problem," Chambrun said. He had gone to the wall safe and taken from it a card, an ordinary filing card. It rested on the desk in front of him. "He is an Egyptian citizen, but in truth he belongs to no country unless you think of Quadrant International as a nation. This man's father was an important political figure in Egypt in the days of the late king. The father married a famous British actress named Lois Dexter.

"Your man, my guest, chooses to call himself Dexter Fahid. He's about thirty-five years old. He has bank accounts in New York, London, Cairo, and almost certainly in Switzerland. Secret-numbered accounts in Switzerland. He has a Rolls-Royce at his disposal here in New York, another in London, a third in Cairo. He has his own private jet plane. And yet, Jason, this man inherited nothing from his father or his mother but his wits.

"He has amassed his enormous fortune as a special emissary for Quadrant. He is the man who buys and sells kings and presidents, prime ministers, senators and congressmen, bankers and supposed patriots for Quadrant. He is the master of the treacherous payoff. This man knows enough to turn the whole political world upside-down. He is a genius at skulduggery. This man knows enough to blow Quadrant International out of the water for a long time."

"And I go to him and say, 'Please, Mr. Fahid, tell me something that will help me get my girl back?'" Dark sounded bitter. "He would laugh himself sick."

"Not if he was too frightened to laugh," Chambrun said.

"And what could frighten him that much?" Dark asked.

"The presence of a believable fanatic," Chambrun said.

Mr. Dexter Fahid, trim and athletic-looking, his black hair and black mustache trimmed by a stylist—nothing so ordinary as a barber for Fahid—had concluded a most satisfactory evening. There had been a dinner at Twenty-One with a carefully chosen lady. The lady was chosen for a kind of elegance that would attract attention to her escort. Dexter Fahid enjoyed the spotlight. He enjoyed being stared at like a Hollywood star, and it was also good for his business, which was buying and selling people. He had to look—and smell, he thought—like money.

After Twenty-One there was an intimate night club with an enchanting girl singer. Dexter Fahid regretted, briefly, that he wasn't spending the evening with the entertainer. Ali, his cousin and body-guard, had tried to arrange that for him without success on another occasion. Fahid accepted little defeats, like the girl singer, without too much regret because he never suffered big defeats. That was why he squired his lady of the evening around town in a Rolls-Royce driven by Ali, and why he could have supplied her with the same kind of transportation in London and Cairo, and could have flown her to those places in his own jet.

Tonight his impressive suite at the Beaumont—the daily rate for it would have staggered most people—was perfect for the occasion. Champagne in an ice bucket awaited him and the lady. They talked a little about fun places in different parts of the world. In the end the lady provided the delights for which Fahid had paid so handsomely.

But unlike a man who had conquered through courtship, Dexter Fahid did not take the lady home. He thanked her with courtesy and charm but Ali was given the job of transporting the lady. Ali had given his cousin and employer a slight smile just as he left.

"You mind if I take my time about this?" he asked.

Fahid didn't mind. He glanced at his watch. It was almost three o'clock in the morning. Ali wouldn't be back till breakfast time at the earliest, he told himself. Wearing an elegant silk dressing gown, Fahid stretched out on the couch in his living room, armed with a nightcap of Spanish brandy on the rocks, and picked up some papers that had to do with tomorrow's luncheon with a Syrian diplomat. He could almost taste the man's greed. There would be no problem persuading the Syrian to use his influence on behalf of Quadrant

International. Fahid was just glancing at a column of figures when all the lights in his suite went out.

Now a man living in his own home is usually prepared for such emergencies. He has a flashlight hidden away somewhere, or candles. In the Beaumont where nothing ever went wrong Fahid was unprepared. He found his cigarette lighter on the coffee table beside the couch and flicked it on. It was absurdly inadequate in the high-ceilinged room but it showed him the telephone. He picked it up and was promptly answered by the switchboard operator.

"This is Dexter Fahid," he said. "All the lights seem to have gone out in 12C. Is it a general power failure?"

"No, Mr. Fahid. I'll have a maintenance man there at once. So sorry for the inconvenience."

Fahid, with the aid of his lighter, found the little vestibule at the entrance to his suite and opened the door into the hall. Bright lights everywhere. The door had an automatic closing spring and Fahid propped a small straight-back chair against it to keep it open. Enough light filtered through into the living room to let him see the portable bar in the corner where he refreshed his drink.

Dexter Fahid expected efficiency at the Beaumont, but he was surprised at how quickly the repairman arrived. Fahid was still pouring brandy when he was aware that the front door had closed. An extremely bright electric torch partially blinded Fahid as it was aimed straight at him.

"Thanks for coming so quickly," Fahid said.

"Sorry you've been inconvenienced," the repairman said. Behind the torch he was only a shape. "We'll just have a look at things."

Fahid could see a large black bag or tool kit put down on the table behind the couch. He saw the repairman's hand move in and out of the bag, placing objects on the table which he couldn't identify. The repairman's torch was suddenly aimed at Fahid's half-blinded eyes.

"It is now time to start playing the game," the repairman said.

"I don't understand. Game?"

"The game of life or death, Mr. Fahid," the repairman said. There was something about the deadly calmness of his voice that raised the small hairs on the back of Fahid's neck. He thought of Ali, his protector, now far away.

The light moved out of Fahid's eyes and focused on an object on the table. "Do you see what this is, Mr. Fahid?"

"You've blinded me with your torch," Fahid said, "but it looks like—it looks like a hand grenade."

"Quite correct. It is a hand grenade. You will do exactly what I ask of you, Mr. Fahid, or I will blow you, and me, and this whole wing of the hotel to hell and gone."

"You're joking, of course!" Fahid's laugh was hollow-sounding.

"Would you be joking if your loved ones were dead or being tortured? Would you be joking if you had been subjected to torture yourself? No, Mr. Fahid, I'm not joking. You are the only person who can supply me with the ammunition to destroy my enemy. If you don't choose to give it to me I have no reason to go on living, and I certainly have no reason to preserve your life." A hand lifted the grenade from the table and out of the circle of light. "When I pull the firing pin we will have less than five seconds, not even time for you to get to the front door, even if you could get past me."

"But what have I to do with you—or your enemy?" Fahid, of course, knew the answer to that. Quadrant International. Associating murder or torture with them was not inconceivable.

"Let's not waste time, Mr. Fahid." The repairman's torch focused on the table again. "This is a tape recorder. You will talk into that small microphone. You will identify yourself and then you will tell me what I need to know."

"But I have no idea what you need to know!"

"Names of people you have bribed for Quadrant. Names of diplomats who have betrayed their countries and under what circumstances. I need enough for the State Department and the C.I.A. to involve Quadrant in a worldwide scandal."

"How will you know if I am telling the truth?" Fahid asked, fending for time—time to think.

"Because I already know much of the truth. I only need you to confirm it," the repairman said.

"It might be easier to be blown to pieces than to be punished for betraying my employers," Fahid said.

"You will certainly die if you refuse me," the repairman said. "You must have prepared for such a moment, Mr. Fahid, with your secret bank accounts and your private plane. Sooner or later someone was certain to double-cross you." A hand reached out and lifted the grenade out of sight again. "Your decision has to be now. Time is running out."

Dexter Fahid was sweating. "I will be dead whatever I do," he said, in a shaken voice.

"You will certainly be dead if you don't give me what I ask for," the repairman said. "But I'll give you a chance to beat the other rap,

Mr. Fahid. I'll give you one full day before I make the tapes public. In a day you can reach any safe place on earth you have prepared for yourself. Now, Mr. Fahid—or never."

Fahid moistened dry lips, and then he reached for the little microphone. "My name," he began, "is Dexter Fahid. I am—or have been—a contact man, a dealer, for Quadrant International. Let me begin with the oil-producing countries in the Middle East—"

The cold was bone-chilling. The location was a little wooded area surrounding the fourth tee of a golf course in Westchester, some miles out of the city. Jason Dark stood beside a bench on which he had placed a black leather suitcase. He was warmly enough dressed for this winter night, and it occurred to him that what chilled him to the core was not the weather but fear that his plan, his and Pierre Chambrun's, would fail.

It was nine o'clock at night, a moonlit night. It was almost 14 hours since Dexter Fahid had finished talking into Dark's tape recorder in suite 12C at the Beaumont. It had taken three hours for Dark to have copies of the tapes made and to dispose of the copies in a satisfactory fashion. Then he had gone home to his duplex apartment on East 40th Street to wait. This was the day when Sharon's kidnapers had said they would contact him.

He had had no sleep, but he couldn't sleep. Sleep would be filled with nightmares. Once, shortly after noon, the phone rang.

"This is not the call you are waiting for, Jason," Pierre Chambrun's cool voice said. "But I thought you should know that our friend, Mr. Fahid, has taken off. He checked out of the hotel shortly after nine o'clock. He'd asked for his bill earlier, but he apparently had to wait for his cousin and bodyguard to return from somewhere. His private jet took off from Kennedy a little after eleven, heading for Argentina according to the control tower. He didn't keep a luncheon appointment with a Syrian diplomat, nor did he leave any excuse or explanation for that gentleman. I think that is important."

"Why?" Dark asked in a flat dull voice.

"To give you hope," Chambrun said. "If Fahid wasn't in full flight he would have left some word for the Syrian gentleman. He was to have been a customer. It tells me that what is on the tapes is genuine."

Hope, God knows, he needed. But the day wore on and twilight came and there was no word from Sharon's kidnapers. Then there was darkness. Then there was the call.

There were instructions on how to reach the fourth tee of a certain golf course. Dark was to bring with him the evidence they had tried to get from him once before during the brutal destruction of his hand. He was to be at the designated place at nine o'clock.

"How do I know that Sharon Evans is alive and that you will turn her over to me unharmed?"

The caller allowed himself a brief chuckle. "You will have to take my word for it, friend."

Now Dark waited on that wintry golf course. It was a few minutes past nine, and Dark's anxiety mounted. Perhaps they had learned, since their call, about Fahid. Perhaps they wouldn't come. If they didn't he knew he would never see Sharon again. The gamble he and Chambrun had taken would be lost.

"Dark!" It was a muffled voice.

A man walked out of the woods, his face covered with a ski mask. Months ago two men wearing ski masks had destroyed Dark's right hand. This could be one of those men. Dark felt his pulse beating.

"The evidence is in that bag?" the man asked.

Dark bent down and opened the bag. All that was in it was a cassette tape player. "Before I turn this over to you I would like you to listen to something," he said. He turned on the player.

"My name is Dexter Fahid," a tiny-sounding voice said. "I am—or have been—a contact man, a dealer for Quadrant International. Let me begin with the oil-producing countries in the Middle East—"

The voice went on, naming names, quoting sums of money. The man in the ski mask stood motionless, listening. After a while Dark switched off the machine in mid-sentence.

"There are four full tapes of this information," he said. "I apologize for the quality of the recording, but of course this is a copy. The original tapes are in the hands of friends. If they don't hear from me by nine thirty—which is exactly twenty-two minutes from now—they will be turned over to the State Department and the C.I.A."

"Your price?" the man asked, quite calmly.

"Sharon Evans, safe and unharmed."

"And if we deliver her?"

"Then the tapes will stay where they are," Dark said.

"Can we depend on it?"

Dark gave the man a thin smile. "You will have to take my word for it, friend."

Ski-mask was still motionless. "I cannot produce Miss Evans in twenty-two minutes."

"Twenty minutes and thirty seconds now," Dark said.

"How long will it take you to get back to your apartment?" the man asked.

"Fifty minutes."

"Go, then. Miss Evans will be waiting for you when you arrive. But I must have those tapes. My superiors must know why I have made a deal with you—if I am to survive."

"Help yourself," Dark said. "There are several copies. You may even have the player."

Forty-eight minutes later Dark unlocked the door of his apartment on East 40th Street and Sharon came running across the room and into his arms. They clung to each other like children who had been lost.

She told her story. She had been held in a private house only a few blocks away by men in ski masks. She had been well treated. They had brought her here only a few moments ago and told her to expect Dark.

"Oh, Jason, you gave up the evidence you suffered so much to keep!" She pressed her cheek against his black-gloved hand.

"On the contrary," he said. "I got even better evidence against them." He told her of Chambrun's scheme and how he had persuaded Dexter Fahid that he was a dangerous fanatic. He told her about his meeting on the golf course. "Tomorrow," he said, "an international scandal will break that will make Watergate look like a kindergarten exercise."

"You double-crossed them!" she said, almost laughing. "You told them the tapes would stay where they were if I was produced."

"The exact truth," Dark said. "Because the tapes have been at the State Department and the C.I.A. since early this afternoon." He held her close, touched her soft blonde hair with the fingers of his left hand. "Chambrun persuaded me to play the role of a fanatic," he said. "It worked. But then I discovered I really was a fanatic—on the subject of your safety. Nothing could persuade me to refrain from punishing them for having dared to touch you, love."

He reached for the telephone on the table behind the couch on which they were sitting. "Time to let the boys in Washington know that you're safe and they can go ahead and lower the boom."

Charlene Weir

The Palindrome Syndrome

George Potter suffered from insomnia. He had tried every cure his keen mind could think of, including such well-known ones as taking a hot bath and drinking warm milk before retiring. He had never heard of red rum inducing sleep . . .

George Potter sighed at the cruel fate that compelled him to go through life burdened with a nocturnal affliction. Rays from the streetlight, filtering through a gap in the curtain, caught the lampshade and threw a shadow on the ceiling. George stared at the shadow and tried to make it represent something new. But it refused to resemble anything except a black bear. While he watched, the black bear faded slowly into a dirty polar bear, then disappeared altogether as night tipped over into dawn.

He sighed again, a sigh that went unheard because of the jangle of the alarm. Ethel stopped in mid-breath, slapped the clock to silence, yawned, stretched, and jumped out of bed. She wrapped her short plump figure in a fuzzy pink garment. "Good morning, George. It's time to get up." Her blue eyes were clear and bright.

George moaned and rubbed his gritty, bloodshot, brown ones. Once he was up he had great difficulty with things like toothpaste and shoelaces. Later, at his office, he had trouble distinguishing the debits from the credits. In the drug store at noon he was yawning into his vegetable soup when Henry Williamson slid onto the stool next to him.

George didn't care much for Henry. Henry was a round-faced beaming man who still had all his hair even if it was gray. But today George was so demoralized that his troubles came spilling out. George admitted he had a severe problem.

He suffered from insomnia. All too often he stumbled to bed at 11:30 after fighting to keep awake until the end of the news, only to find that once in bed his heavy eyelids recoiled as though held by a tight spring and released a flurry of night thoughts like pigeons from a coop.

He tried everything from warm milk and hot baths to counting sheep and picturing the word *sleep* on a blackboard, written with each inhalation and erased with each exhalation. He tried taking his age, 55, and counting backward. He even doubled it and counted back from 110. He supposed he could count the gray hairs on his head, but as there were less of them each night that would be more depressing than somniferous.

Months ago he had learned that none of these devices produced the desired effect. Driven by the circumstances, he worked out a careful pattern. Night after night, feeling he was the only person awake in a world of the sleeping, he would get out of bed, don robe and slippers, and shuffle out to the kitchen leaving Ethel, breathing gently, alone in the bed. Ethel slept like the goldmining stocks he had once bought from a friend.

He fixed himself a pot of hot chocolate and settled in his overstuffed chair in the living room. For exactly one hour he worked crossword puzzles in the stack of magazines on the bottom shelf of the bookcase.

Then George moved on to the jigsaw puzzle and for precisely one hour he fitted pieces together. He studied the shape and color of each particular piece before picking it up. He prided himself on his ability to choose the correct piece before touching it with his fingers. A certain number of pieces fitted in this manner was a good omen. But if he made too many errors, if the pieces he chose didn't slip into the allotted spots, it meant sleep would be more elusive than ever that night.

Leaving the jigsaw puzzle, he moved back to his chair and selected a book from the row of current bestsellers on the second shelf of the bookcase. He read for exactly 30 minutes. Often this was a slow and gentle soporific, bringing on a yawn by the end of the first chapter and drowsiness by the end of the third.

The top shelf of the bookcase held his last and most desperate measure. Here he kept publications of the latest political activities, and he read these for 45 minutes.

He must follow this routine meticulously. If he deviated by so much as one minute, then all was lost. But if he followed his schedule exactly, then sometimes—oh, sometimes!—he was rewarded with a few hours of blessed sleep. Indeed sometimes, so deadly dull were the politicians' statements that he stumbled toward the bedroom, removing robe and slippers on the way, and reached the bed just in time to flop comatose across it.

If occasionally he was tricked into staying in bed by thinking that sleep was just a few minutes away, his adversity was compounded. He was then beguiled by the flock of thoughts fluttering around his head and he would pluck one from its fellows and examine it until an hour or two before he had to get up. Too many nights of insufficient sleep were making him old before his time, causing his hands to tremble and dulling his keen mind.

"Is that all that's bothering you?" Henry said, slathering ketchup on French fries and piling onions and pickles on a hamburger. "Don't give it another thought. I know just the thing to solve your problem." He paused to balance a slice of tomato on top of the heap, then said, "Palindromes." He smiled like a man with eight solid hours of sleep behind him.

"Palindromes?"

"Sure. You know, words that read the same backwards or forwards."

"I don't think I understand," George said, already sorry he had confided in Henry.

"My boy, you really are in bad shape, aren't you? Good thing you ran into me today. Your troubles are over, believe me. Palindromes are the answer. Words like *madam*. The same backwards or forwards. Surely, you know the famous one about Napoleon: *Able was I ere I saw Elba*. Spelled the same each way. A-b-l—"

"Yes, but how is that going to help me get to sleep? Am I supposed to say it over and over?"

"Oh, no, no. You don't get the idea at all." Henry washed a mouthful of hamburger down with a gulp of coffee. "You have to make up your own. You start out small with single words like *dog god*. You see? Then you work up to sentences like the *Able Elba* one. Whenever I can't sleep, out come the old words and in fifteen minutes I'm sleeping like a night watchman. Never fails. I've been working on one for weeks. Starts out *Enid Star* and ends up *rats dine*. But I always fall asleep before I get the middle part worked out."

George had no faith in anything Henry might suggest, but that same night when George had gone from the crossword puzzles to the politicians and was still awake at 4:30, he felt he had nothing to lose. He got *level* right off. A few minutes later he had *snip pins*, a revolutionary new sewing gadget. He was working on *ten net* when sleep swarmed over him.

The next night with something very near panic he abandoned his carefully worked-out schedule—the crosswords, jigsaws, bestsellers,

and politicians that had served him long if not faithfully. With nervous trepidation he hesitantly embraced this new endeavor. He reviewed the previous night's crop, then produced *reel leer* and *devil lived* and *snap pans*. The last one was a special kind of cookware, he thought, floating on clouds of sleep. From then on there was no stopping him.

He was ecstatic. He was getting six or seven hours of sleep where before he only got one or two, sometimes none. It wasn't long before he was doing sentences. *Warts level straw* was his first. After that came *Pat repaid a diaper tap*. He was rather proud of that one. No more single words—grander creations were ahead.

In his delirium of joy there was something George failed to notice. Any addict could have pointed it out to him, but George went along happily building up his palindromic power without realizing that it was taking stronger and stronger doses each time before he drifted off to sleep. The night he finished Henry's *Enid Star* he was back to a mere two hours. But he couldn't wait to tell Henry what he had created. *Enid Star lived ere devil rats dine*.

One morning two months later, after no sleep at all, he sat down at the breakfast table and blurted out to Ethel, "*Mort's war on time did emit no raw storm*." He was too groggy from lack of sleep to catch the error in the first and last words.

Ethel stopped dishing out scrambled eggs to stare at him.

"Well, there's this guy Mort," George said, "who was extremely angry about buying all these products on the time-payment plan, so he—"

"You're sick, George," she said, dumping eggs on his plate. "You better see a doctor."

"*Rot cod?*" George pooh-poohed that idea. He wasn't sick. Far from it. At work his mind seemed to clack away like a well-oiled computer. True, he felt a little tired now and then and his boss was becoming a mite unreasonable about George's nonchalance in the matter of debits and credits; but other than that, George never felt better.

His excitement with the game became so high that like all fanatics he wished to share the enchantment and bring in converts. He took to waking up Ethel when he had worked out a particularly intricate treasure.

The first time, Ethel responded with *dam mad* and George soared to dizzying heights of happiness. He could see it all now—he and Ethel lying side by side through endless nights of palindromes. She

would be the *Anna* to his *Otto*, and *edit* to his *tide*, the *loop* to his *pool*, the *smart* to his *trams*, the—

But alas, this sweet dream did not come to pass, because when he woke her on a subsequent occasion she threw the pillow at him, yelling she had to go to work in the morning. Reluctantly he was forced to the conclusion that her first response represented the state of her mind and that she had not grasped the delights of the game.

But George wasn't discouraged. Periodically he would wake her to share a new find and each time he hoped she would lovingly join him in palindroming through the long dark hours.

Not only was Ethel stupidly uninterested in the palindromes, but he noticed she was beginning to behave oddly. She seemed to get thinner, and there were black smudges under her eyes. Any unexpected noise sent her flying apart like a startled cat. Sometimes she stared blankly into space or just sat and whimpered. She definitely wasn't her usual self.

Perhaps it's her age, George thought. He renewed his efforts to arouse her interest in his game. Almost every night he would wake her to astound her with a new discovery. He would have been willing to do it more often but the time came when she refused to speak to him after being awakened.

One evening, six months after it all began, George felt he was ready. He intended to compose the greatest palindrome of all time. He was so eager to get started that he could hardly wait until the news was over before he rushed off to bed. He plumped his pillow, lay on his back staring at the black bear on the ceiling, and flexed his mental fingers. This was it. He was ready and confident. All his rigorous training had led up to this supreme moment.

While Ethel tossed around making herself comfortable he did a few warmup exercises. *Civic. Sagas. Solos.* By the time he completed these simple scales, Ethel was sleeping.

Midnight. Time to begin. Adrenalin coursed through his body and his heart jumped with the thrill of challenge, this greatest of all challenges.

George wiped his sweaty palms on the blanket and took a few deep breaths. With talent such as his there was no need to be nervous. In a short time he had selected his beginning words: *Pat. Let.*

At one o'clock he could see that he'd have to make notes. His was the caliber of champions. This creation would be much too long to figure out without writing it down. He switched on the lamp and rummaged through the ~~drawer to find pencil and paper.~~

Ethel opened one bleary blue eye and glared at him. "George, what are you doing?"

"It's okay," he said. "It's coming along fine."

She put the pillow over her head.

George scribbled hastily for moments at a time, then chewed on the end of the pencil while his brain worked at lightning speed. All went well until three o'clock. At three o'clock he was stuck. At 3:30 he was still stuck. He howled in frustration and pounded the bed with his fist.

Ethel reared up in bed, looking around in confusion. "What?"

"A little bit of a problem. But don't worry. I'm not going to quit."

Ethel mumbled something that sounded like never-get-any-sleep, but George was too involved in his words to hear clearly. She punched her pillow and turned her back on him.

A half hour later he was still stuck. He placed his hand on the mound next to him and shook it. "Ethel?"

"Mmm?"

"Ethel!"

She sat up and shook her head groggily. "What is it?"

"Ethel, tell me a word that ends in r-e-m."

"What? You woke me up at four o'clock in the morning to ask me for a word that ends in r-e-m? You're crazy, George. That's what you are. Crazy." Her face got dangerously red and she started to vibrate like a rocket about to take off.

George waited tensely, hoping the vibrations meant her mind was working on r-e-m. But after a few moments she flopped back down and flung the blanket up over her quivering cheeks.

At first George was hurt, but then he understood. Of course. Ethel was quite right. He must solve the problem by himself. Otherwise it wouldn't count. He had almost ruined his night's work by asking for help. He sighed and rested briefly, letting relief at his narrow escape cool his sweaty brow.

Then he went back to it. It was, indeed, a knotty problem. *Theorem* seemed to be the only word in the English language that ended in r-e-m. And that word was totally useless to him. He strained and suffered in agony while his brain toiled on. Then at last he had it. "Oh ho," he shouted, then repeated it backward. "Oh ho."

The mound under the blankets muttered.

"Harem," George told the mound joyfully.

He worked brilliantly and steadily until five o'clock when he began to get drowsy. ~~He got up, not bothering~~ with the robe and

slippers, and made a pot of strong black coffee. He put this, along with a cup and saucer, on a tray and carried it back to the bedroom. The empty cup tended to rattle just a little.

As he was placing the tray on the bedside table, Ethel leaped out of bed, ripped off the blankets, and dragged them out of the room.

George stared in puzzlement until she disappeared into the dark of the living room. Then he poured a cup of coffee and went back to his creation.

At 6:30 he finished the coffee and the last word at the same time.

Masterful! He held the paper at arm's length and read it, then clasped it to his chest. Magnificent!

"Ethel," he shouted jubilantly as he ran into the living room. "Ethel, I've done it! I'm finished!"

Ethel, wrapped in blankets, was lying on the couch. He grabbed her shoulder and jerked it back and forth. "I'm going to read it to you," he said. "But first let me explain that it's a note from this boss to his secretary. The boss is planning a lecture series for small towns and the secretary knows of several local men who want to give lectures. One wants to talk about a nomad. You understand? It starts out *Pat*. That's the name of the secretary. *Pat, Let—*"

"*Red rum!*" Ethel yelled, erupting from the blankets and racing to the kitchen.

George paled. "No, no," he whispered.

"*On, on,*" Ethel replied, returning with a knife. Waving it above her head she ran toward him shrieking, "*Bats! Bats! Bats!*" and she plunged the knife into his chest.

"*Enog esoog,*" George gasped as he crumpled to the floor.

Ethel dropped the knife and staggered weakly to the bed.

In the afternoon when she got up she found the paper lying next to the body. It was covered with rusty brown spots, but she was still able to read it.

Pat,

Let one rustic at a time yammer. "A hag, nomad, evil madam lived among a harem" may emit a tacit, sure note.

L. Tap

When she showed it to the psychiatrist he said it was definitely the product of a disturbed mind.

At her trial the judge was very sympathetic. He said that owing to the extreme provocation of the conditions leading up to this tragic event her action was understandable and under the circumstances was "*no evil, Madam, Live on.*"

Lawrence Treat

F As in Frame-Up

It looked like a run-of-the-mill case—the theft of a necklace. But when murder came into the picture, Lieutenant Decker no longer had "an easy one" . . .

Detectives: HOMICIDE SQUAD

Lieutenant William Decker, Chief of Homicide, was a tall girder of a man with gray hair and gray eyes that were widely spaced. After 30 years of police work, one of the few illusions left to him was the quaint superstition that tough cases always started before breakfast. So when the dispatcher phoned just after Decker had finished his second cup of coffee, he told himself this would be an easy one; and what the dispatcher said reassured him.

There had been a robbery in the exclusive Short Hills section. The address was 59 Burroughs Lane, the name of the party was Welland, and some jewels had disappeared. It was the type of case in which regulations specified that Homicide had to be notified and had to send a man to assist, but which the local precinct usually handled thereafter. Because Decker had nothing pressing on his desk and because, for a change of pace, he hankered after expensive houses and well-bred people, he said he'd go there himself.

The house was brick, Georgian and semi-palatial; and an affable, easy-going man wearing a Shetland sports jacket opened the door. He was in his early thirties and he introduced himself as Alec Welland.

"Sorry about making all this fuss," he said. "People ought to learn to take care of their property. They shouldn't let themselves get robbed."

Lieutenant Decker agreed, and strode past him to get a report from the precinct detective who was carrying the case. His name was Quinn, and he looked as if he'd gone to college and majored in physical education. He was obviously surprised at finding the head

of the Homicide Squad here; he took the Lieutenant into a spacious living room and motioned him to a corner. Decker sensed that Quinn saw a chance to impress him and maybe land himself a job on the Homicide Squad next time there was a vacancy.

"Here's the story," Quinn said, lowering his voice confidentially. "The Wellands went away for the weekend, down to Scofield. They both agree that the necklace, which was insured for forty grand, was in Mrs. Welland's bureau drawer late yesterday afternoon, when they left. She says she always kept it there loose, as if it was junk, because that was safer than locking it up in a jewelry box."

"I guess she found out how safe it was," Decker remarked.

"That's what I told her," Quinn said forcefully. He glanced at the door as if to make sure nobody was eavesdropping. "Well, about midnight the maid, Felicia, called them to say that the necklace was gone and they'd better come back, which they did. Felicia, incidentally, is no ordinary maid. Comes from Lithuania, she's a refugee, and only escaped a few months ago; but she's well educated and more a friend of the family than a servant. There are other servants, but they don't sleep in."

"What made Felicia wake up and discover the robbery?" Decker asked.

"She had a reason," Quinn said. "She's taking courses in adult education at the local high school, and she met a man there called George. She doesn't know his last name, but he apparently fell for her and came over last night to take her to the movies. When he made a pass at her, she refused to go. Then, to sort of make up, they had a drink together. He must have drugged hers, because that's all she remembers until she woke up with a king-size headache."

"When did she find out about the necklace?"

"Right away. She says she realized she'd been had, and so she looked around the house and saw that Mrs. Welland's bureau had been searched and one of the drawers turned upside down. The necklace was gone. She phoned the Wellands and—" Quinn consulted his pad—"they got back around two a.m. Mrs. Welland was upset, Felicia was still sick, and the two of them had minor hysterics. Mr. Welland says he couldn't stand it. He slammed out of the house and went driving in his big Chrysler. He got back about six and they all had breakfast, and then he called us. I think that covers it."

"It sure as hell does," Decker said. "You're trying to locate this George, of course."

"Yes, sir. We're checking up at the school, but what I'm wondering about is who told George where the necklace was. With nothing touched except that one bureau drawer, it looks like a put-up job." Decker nodded. Quinn had made a competent, orderly investigation. They'd find George and he'd probably deny the robbery and the drugging, and the maid might or might not turn out to be an accomplice. But there was plenty on George, and everything shaped up as a run-of-the-mill case. Still, it might be a good idea for Decker to see the two women.

He met Isabel Welland in the dining room, over a cup of coffee. She was blonde and lovely, and her eyes were blue and clear and intelligent. When she smiled, she brightened the lot of the poor and gave comfort to mankind. She was a lady, endowed with beauty and trained to carry it gracefully.

Felicia, who brought the coffee, was something else again, and Decker studied her with respect. She was young and attractive, with dark hair and deep, liquid eyes. It was hard to realize that she was one of those remarkable people who had begged, fought, and forced their way from behind the Iron Curtain through sheer force of will and at the risk of their lives. She spoke English with a barely noticeable accent.

On the surface she was soft and pliable, gleaming with innocence, and the sight of her went right through Lieutenant Decker. Forty years dropped off him in a breath, and he almost popped out of his chair. He was glad he didn't have to interrogate her, because all he wanted to do was protect her.

"I understand you had a tough time of it," he remarked to her.

"It was a nothing," she said. "It is over." Then the phone rang and she answered it.

"For the Lieutenant Decker," she said, turning toward him and addressing him as if he were royalty.

With that phone call, the fun was over. There was a homicide over in the slum section, near the river. A man named George McCoster had been shot.

Decker blinked. "George," he said thoughtfully. "George."

He looked squarely at Felicia, and she stared straight back at him as if she'd heard every word over the phone and had guessed every thought that had gone through Decker's mind.

The facts surrounding the murder of George were as clear as plastic. George McCoster had been a known jewel thief. His body was lying just inside the door of his shabby, furnished room, and a

reconstruction of the crime indicated that he'd been shot twice without warning, from a distance of about a foot. Time of death was set around 4:00 a.m., and the bullets had probably been fired from a .32 Smith & Wesson. The gun was not found, nor was there any trace of the Welland necklace.

Later in the day, after the dull, grim work of examining the body and after Decker had put the squad to work trying to find witnesses and trying to pump information out of them, he sent for Felicia. She came, escorted by a uniformed cop, and she gazed without a tremor at the dead face and said confidently, "He is the man who visited me."

Since the robbery tied in with a homicide, the whole business was now dumped in Decker's lap. Like it or not, he had Felicia as a prime suspect, and he questioned her in the privacy of his pint-sized office that contained his desk and three chairs, a stuffed crocodile, and stacks of unfiled and unread police journals.

"Felicia," he said, "you're in trouble. You realize that, don't you?"

She smiled, as if *he* were in trouble and she felt sorry for him.

"Every piece of evidence points right at you," Decker continued, "so tell me what you did with the necklace."

"I did not take it," she said quietly. "Mrs. Welland is my so good friend. I could not steal from her."

"Maybe not," Decker said. Her eyes, limpid and trusting, haunted him, and instead of blasting away with his usual dynamite, he fumbled like an Assistant D.A. on his first assignment. "Maybe," he said, "but how could you meet this George in school when he wasn't even enrolled?"

"He was in the corridor. He saw me, he spoke."

"A guy like him—you figured him for a student? It was written all over him that he was a thug."

"I do not know the types here in America. Or the customs."

"You don't have to," Decker said. "You're a woman—you know when a guy's genuine or not. And you typed him fast enough after he came to the house."

"I asked him to go," she said with dignity, as if her obvious virtue ought to answer all the Lieutenant's questions.

Decker glowered and waited for the sparks to fly between them, but she merely studied him with a sorrowful, pitying look. Then, in the grip of one of his wild, extravagant hunches, he asked a question that had no apparent reason behind it.

"Felicia," he said, "did Mr. Welland ever make a pass at you?"

She frowned, not understanding the expression, and Decker had to explain. "Did he ever try to make love to you?"

"But certainly. I am so nice."

"And you let him?"

"No. I am very strong, Mr. Lieutenant, and I do not let anybody do that."

"So he tried, and you sent him packing, and I suppose you told Mrs. Welland about it."

"Oh, yes. We discussed it often."

"I see," Decker said meekly. "Now tell me exactly what you did and what you and Mrs. Welland talked about between two and six in the morning."

She told him, and later on, when Isabel Welland confirmed every detail, Decker crossed Felicia off the list. Not that the two women couldn't have cooked up that alibi, with their mutual understanding that almost amounted to telepathy, but because he believed in Felicia.

With a growing sense that he was up against something unusual, Decker analyzed the problem. He reasoned that McCoster must have been killed because of the missing necklace, and that only three people knew McCoster had taken it—namely Felicia and the two Wellands. Therefore, if neither Felicia nor Isabel had gone to McCoster's house, then Alec Welland had.

Before questioning Alec, however, Decker ordered a full-scale investigation of Alec's background, of his purchase of the necklace, and of his relationship with Isabel.

The reports were dismal enough. Isabel, the heiress to a substantial fortune, had married Alec when she was only 17. She'd fallen for his charm and his easy-going assurance, and she'd let him manage her affairs and gradually transferred all her assets to his name. Today she had practically nothing in her own name.

Alec was a gambler. He'd played the horses and he'd lost; he'd gone to Las Vegas and he'd lost; and he'd bet on all the wrong numbers in the private roulette clubs—until he'd run out of Isabel's cash.

Money poured through his fingers like a handful of water; and he spent it by the gallon. He signed checks without regard to his bank balance, borrowed money in a casual, offhand way, and if he ever found any loose currency around, he simply took it. He was a wastrel and an unfaithful husband, and everybody agreed that Isabel was a saint and that any other woman would have left him long ago.

Once Alex was divested of his posture of the wealthy squire, Decker brought him into the Squad Room, and with Bankhart and Charlie Small assisting, the Lieutenant blazed away.

"You bought the necklace for twenty thousand," Decker said, tapping a copy of the bill of sale, "and you insured it for forty. Right?"

"Right," Alec said. "Smart of me, wasn't it?"

"Where'd you get the money to buy the necklace?"

"I refuse to answer on the grounds that—"

"We know where you got it," Decker said. "You had a lucky night in a dice game. You paid five grand in cash and talked the jeweler into giving you credit for the rest."

"If you know all about it," Alec said, "why ask me?"

"What did you buy it for?"

"For my wife's birthday."

"Her birthday's in January. This is October."

Alec shrugged. "I thought you sent for me to get some information. But instead—"

"Instead—what?" Decker asked sharply.

"Instead, you're accusing me."

"Of what?"

"I'll tell you," Alec said grandiosely. "You think I planned on an insurance fraud. Maybe I did. I'd be stupid if the idea never crossed my mind, but that's as far as it went. This McCoster solved my problem. He stole the necklace, probably in cahoots with Felicia. That girl's capable of anything."

"You own a gun," Decker said. "You have a license for a Smith and Wesson 'thirty-two.' Where's the gun?"

"Funny thing," Alec said, "but I don't know. It disappeared."

"Under what circumstances?"

"Well, I always kept it in the night table next to my bed, and it was there when we left for the weekend. Do you think McCoster took it?"

"When was the first time you met him?" Decker asked.

Alec didn't fall into the trap. "Met him?" he said. "I never even heard of him until he turned up dead after Felicia brought him into the house."

"Do you deny knowing him?" Decker asked.

"Never saw him in my life."

"You hired him to steal the necklace," Decker said grimly. "You figured you had a wingding of an idea—he keeps the necklace and sells it for whatever he can get, and you collect the insurance."

"Did *he* tell you that?" Alec asked, grinning.

Bankhart slapped a big paw on Alec's shoulder and spun him around in his chair. "Better not kid around," Bankhart said.

Alec stopped grinning. "I don't know what this is all about," he said, swallowing nervously.

Decker, reasonably confident that he'd guessed Alec's scheme, switched the line of questioning. "Just tell us," Decker said, "where you were from two a.m. when you left your house until six a.m. when you returned."

"I went driving," Alec said. "I headed north—I don't remember exactly where I went. But I like speed and I had a good fast car, and I wanted to get away from those women. You don't know them. They're together all the time. They hate me, they'd like to see me dead. They put on a scene about the necklace and they accused me of the same thing you did—hiring this George to steal the necklace."

"They were right about it," Decker said.

"No. I'm telling you—I didn't know McCoster, I had nothing to do with him."

The next day four members of the Homicide Squad spent a total of 28 hours trying to disprove Alec's statement. They came up with the information that Alec had seen McCoster twice. The first time they'd had a drink together in a bar and the waitress had overheard them talking about a necklace; and a day later Alec had parked his big gray car in front of McCoster's and had been seen entering the house.

Decker reviewed the situation at the regular morning session of the Homicide Squad.

"We're beginning to see the peep of daylight," he said. "Alec practically admitted the insurance fraud. He saw McCoster and discussed necklaces; and somebody must have told McCoster where to find Felicia, what she looked like, where the necklace was, and on what night the Wellands would be away from home. Can anyone except Alec fit the role?"

"So what?" Bankhart said. "That adds up to an insurance fraud, but where's the evidence of a homicide?"

"You hit it on the pimple," Decker said. "We're playing ring-around-the-rosie with him, and the guy knows it. Until we can nail him to the scene, or else find that gun—"

"I'll tell you where it is," Balenky said. "It's buried under a tree or else lying in a junk heap, and it's maybe fifty miles away. The guy was driving for a couple of hours, so how do we dream up where

he hid the gun? And maybe the necklace, too."

"Check," Decker said, "but somebody saw Welland around four a.m. Somebody heard the shot. Somebody saw the car. Go find the guy."

With that, Decker broke up the meeting, and the squad went out grumbling. It was the sort of slow, dogged, dull work that they hated, but they knew Decker wouldn't let up. He'd decided there was a witness and that they'd find him.

Charlie Small came back late in the day, and with an unexpected answer. Nobody had seen Alec's big gray Chrysler, but a couple of bums had seen a small green, foreign car parked in front of McCoster's at about 4:00 a.m. and one of the bums had leaned over the fender and been sick.

Decker let out a whoop and sent for the Welllands' second car, which was a small green, foreign one. Jub Freeman, looking like an overgrown cherub, studied the stains and made scrapings and said that their analysis was a job for the pathologist, over in the Medical Examiner's office. Mitch Taylor took charge of the samples and brought them over, and a few hours later the verdict came in. Somebody had been sick all right, and on the right rear fender, after drinking too much cheap whiskey and eating too many peanuts.

That finding was the big break in the case. It put the Welllands' second car at the scene of the crime, and all Decker had to do was to show that Alec had been in it. He decided that Mrs. Welland was his best witness for that, and he sent for her early the next morning.

She came willingly. She was pure and radiant and serene, and she answered his questions with an air of frankness and composure. Nevertheless she defended her husband with all her strength.

"You said you'd heard Alec drive off," Decker said. "You heard the sound of the motor, didn't you?"

"Yes, of course."

"And you can tell the difference between the roar of your big Chrysler and the squeak of that little foreign bug of yours, can't you?"

Isabel Welland seemed to search her soul to find an honest answer. "Is there a difference?" she said archly.

"Never mind," Decker said. "Did you see which car he took?"

"You're trying to prove that Alec committed murder," she said, "but he couldn't have killed this man because Alec didn't have his gun."

"How do you know?" Decker asked.

"It was in his night table when we left for the weekend. I saw it there. And when we got home it was gone. I looked."

"What made you look?"

Isabel shrugged off the question. "I just did. Intuition, perhaps. So how could Alec have shot this man?"

"Mrs. Welland, you didn't get along very well with your husband. Why didn't you divorce him?"

"Divorce Alec?" she said in surprise. "Oh, no, and for the most sordid of reasons. He's not a very steady provider, but he does manage. And besides, he has all my money."

"The court would give you a pretty good settlement."

"That wouldn't help me," she said. "Can you conceive of Alec actually paying up? Lieutenant, I wouldn't let myself in for that."

Which, Decker reflected, was a strange answer. Because, if she wanted to divorce her husband and couldn't, what was sweeter than framing him for a murder? And her very defense of him was suspicious. The loyal, virtuous wife lying to defend her husband? Any jury would see through that, and she knew it. So if she wanted to fry Alec, she was going about it the right way.

The implications obsessed Decker, and he locked himself up in his tiny office and communed with the small stuffed crocodile on top of his bookcase. He told himself that he'd lost his objectivity in this case. He'd gone soft on Felicia and believed every word she'd told him, and as a result had concentrated on Alec. But now Decker reviewed the case from scratch.

The small foreign car pointed to a woman, and Decker had two women and they both hated Alec. He recalled Felicia's quiet admission that Alec had tried to make time with her and that she'd even discussed the matter with Isabel. So—here were two women, overly close to each other, and both of them had motive to destroy Alec. All they needed to accomplish it was to cook up an alibi for the two of them, and then stick to it. The murder of McCoster would merely be the means.

Decker put himself in the position of a woman who had just killed somebody and had a gun and a necklace to dispose of, and who was all alone in a car at four o'clock in the morning. She'd be frantic with the fear that Alec would get back to the house before she did. Whatever else, she had to act fast and get rid of the incriminating evidence in a hurry.

Decker sent for a city map, put an X on it where McCoster had lived, and another X at the Welland residence. He traced out three

probable routes that Isabel or Felicia would have taken. Then he got in his car and, driving slowly, he followed the routes and looked for a place where she might have discarded a gun and a necklace.

On his second trip he passed two open lots and a junk pile of old cars. He couldn't find any sign of recent digging in the lots, and he spent an hour looking for the needle in the haystack of old cars. He was mildly pleased with the metaphor, but otherwise discouraged.

He returned to headquarters in a black mood, went over the day's reports, and sifted out assignments for tomorrow. He decided he could spare four men for the search.

Instead of the usual bull session the next morning, he blasted off and orbited himself into space. "Forget Welland," he said. "The little point that we skipped is that either of those two women could have killed McCoster, because they both had motive. That means one of them dumped the gun and the necklace somewhere after leaving McCoster's, and it's got to be in a junk yard or an open lot, and here are the locations."

He slapped the city map down on the table in front of him. "Taylor, Bankhart, Balenky, Small—you're going out there with shovels and pickaxes, so get your tools from the Supply Room. And if anybody has any questions, I don't want to hear them." And Decker swung around and stalked off to his office, where he sweated out the day and burned himself out with waiting.

At five o'clock the four men came back from the junk heap, and they had the gun and the necklace. The necklace, made up of three large diamonds and more smaller ones than Decker bothered to count, was wrapped up in a piece of cleaning tissue, and the gun was jammed with the sand and dirt in which it had been buried. Somebody had shoved it under one of the wrecked cars and covered it lightly with earth.

"Brother!" Decker exclaimed. "Start figuring out when you want to take a couple of days off. You earned 'em."

Seething with suppressed excitement, and at the same time scared that there would be a hitch somewhere, the Lieutenant brought the gun and necklace up to the lab.

"Got 'em!" he said triumphantly to Jub. "Let's see what you can make out of them."

The examination of the gun was simple. Two bullets had been fired, and the serial numbers identified the gun as Alec's.

"I'll clean it up later on and fire some test shots," Jub said. "There's not much doubt about its being the murder weapon. Now, let's have

a look at the necklace."

He bent over it, studying the settings under a lens and removing bits of dirt and foreign matter with a small pair of tweezers. "No blood," he muttered. "With all the filigree work and these sharp edges I thought I might find—"

He broke off. "That's funny," he said. "This—"

"What?" Decker demanded.

"Dunno, yet." Jub, holding a fragment of something in the tweezers, brought it over to a microscope. He gazed through the eyepiece, adjusted it, then straightened up. "Somebody broke a fingernail," he announced, "and the piece got dropped in the tissue and has nail polish on it."

"Brother!" Decker exclaimed. "So all we need is to locate a woman with a broken fingernail, and then match up her nail polish." His face lit up. "Want to come out to the Welland house with me?"

Jub's grin dimpled up both cheeks. "A pleasure," he said.

They drove off with high hopes. The case stacked up as a classic of modern scientific analysis. Isabel or Felicia, in grabbing the necklace after she'd shot McCoster, had ripped her nail and lopped off a sliver, and it had dropped into the cleaning tissue in which she'd wrapped the necklace. And, as Decker observed wryly, she'd hang by her fingernail.

Briefly, in his mind, Decker reviewed the case against each of the women. Motive and opportunity were clear. Both of them had had access to the gun, and either of them could have committed the murder in the expectation that Alec would be held responsible. As long as they backed each other up, they were safe.

Until the fingernail showed up.

Isabel, smiling and gracious, answered the bell when Decker rang it. "Lieutenant," she said, "whatever do you want?"

"To see your hands," he said.

She held them out proudly—patrician hands with slender, tapering fingers and polished, manicured nails. All the nails were intact, and Decker said curtly, "Could we see Felicia for a moment?"

"Why, of course," Isabel said.

Felicia arrived a minute later and Decker, shaking hands with her, glanced down. The polish on her nails was worn and cracked, and several of the ends were broken off.

Decker indicated them. "How come?" he asked.

She pulled her hand away in distaste. "It is always so," she said. "With the work I do, I cannot have beautiful nails. It matters?"

"It matters," Decker said, and explained precisely why. "So that's the end of your mutual alibi. One of you drove over to McCoster's, and all I have to do now is match up the nail polish."

"It would seem so," Isabel said. She hesitated and exchanged a look with Felicia. Decker, keyed up and watching like a hawk, sensed the quick passage of some critical issue between them, followed by a tacit renewal of their loyalty.

"It would seem so," Isabel repeated, "except that I broke my nail a couple of days ago, on the hood button of the car. I had to file my nail down and repair it with a plastic strip. This one." She extended one hand. "It's quite apparent if you look closely."

Obediently, Jub stepped over to examine Isabel's finger. He bent down over it, then lifted his head and nodded. As for Decker, Isabel's statement left him high and dry, and he wondered why she'd made that admission. To protect Felicia? Or to head Felicia off from an accusation fatal to Isabel?

Hood button? The green foreign car had one too, and Felicia—
Suddenly Decker's mind clicked.

He turned to Felicia and said casually, with apparent innocence, "Can you drive?"

"No, I—" She broke off, aghast.

Isabel, stunned, furious, unable to believe she'd heard correctly, froze up in sheer shock.

Decker cleared his throat. "That's what I thought," he said. "Not many cars in Lithuania, not many people there learn to drive. And Felicia never did learn . . . Mrs. Welland, will you come with us?"

EDITORS' NOTE: Here is an interesting footnote to Lawrence Treat's story: according to the 18th Decennial Census taken in April 1960, there are more motor vehicles in the United States than in the entire rest of the world. In metropolitan Los Angeles alone, there are more cars than in Greece, Ireland, Holland, Norway, Poland, and Denmark combined. So Lieutenant Decker's deduction was not mere "hunch"—it was based on fact—the essence of procedural detection.

"Q"

Robert Edward Eckels

The Great Bread Swindle

In these days of inflation Harry's store offered bread at twenty cents a loaf, six loaves for a dollar. You'd think Harry would sell out every day—with bread selling at the supermarket for nearly a dollar a loaf. But there was a catch to it . . .

Monday was the first of the month. On Tuesday the figures for the previous month were released. And on Wednesday Harry Carlson got his usual call from the district manager.

"You know why I'm calling, Harry," Budney said. "You saw the figures and you saw where we stood. And all because we're taking a dead loss on your operation. And you know how I feel about that, Harry."

"Mr. Budney," Harry said, "I keep telling you. There are reasons."

"And I keep telling you, Harry, I don't want reasons. I want results," Budney's voice softened. "I had a lot of high hopes for you, Harry," he said. "You remember how we talked when I put you in there about what the future could hold for a bright ambitious young man at Honeyloaf?"

"Yes, sir," Harry said despondently.

"Well, just remember this too, Harry. People who don't live up to their promise don't have any future at all. So if you know what's good for you, you'll get off your duff and get that store showing a profit. Or, by George, I'll get somebody in there who can."

Harry winced as the phone on the other end was banged down. Sighing, he replaced his own receiver with a great deal more care, then got up, left the cubicle that served as his office, and went out into the store proper.

It was empty except for Marcie Fleming at her post behind the cash register. She looked at Harry sympathetically. "More trouble, Harry?" she said.

Harry shook his head. "No," he said. "Just the same old one. We're not showing a profit—which makes Budney unhappy. And when he's unhappy, everybody's unhappy."

"That's not fair," Marcie said fiercely. She was a pert blonde, 23 years old and 115 pounds soaking wet. She'd been Harry's assistant six months now and had been hopelessly in love with him since the second day. To her satisfaction, things had progressed to where they had an "understanding." To her disappointment, it was becoming increasingly clear they'd never get beyond that.

Harry shrugged, sighed, and looked around the store. It was a small, rather plain place, crowded with display racks which in turn were piled high with loaves of Honeyloaf bread. Suspended from the ceiling above the racks were large handlettered signs reading uniformly: 20 CENTS EACH—SIX LOAVES FOR A DOLLAR. Other racks were stocked with Honeycakes, Honeypies, Honeycookies, and other Honey-goodies, all at prices substantially below those normally charged for first-class bakery goods at any respectable supermarket.

Not that the Honey line wasn't first class or Harry's store respectable—in its fashion. The reason for the bargain prices was simply that these particular items were "day-old"—which, of course, is an industry euphemism for "not fresh." By whatever term, though, it was stuff that hadn't sold in its allotted time and the regular deliverymen would pick it up on schedule as they restocked the stores on their routes, then turn it over to Harry to sell at discount. Or try to anyway.

Actually it wasn't a bad idea as ideas go. The bread might be a little drier than when fresh baked but by any other standard it was just as good and by selling it at any price the company got at least some return on what otherwise would be a total loss. The problem was, though, that the *place* to sell it was in the inner city or out in one of the low- or middle-income suburbs, not here in affluent North Shore.

Placing the store here had been Budney's idea. Budney wanted to be Manager of the Year. And you didn't get there, he was fond of pointing out, by letting money you could be making yourself go out of the district. Budney, Harry decided for the umpteenth time, was a fool.

It was a satisfying thought, but now Marcie called him back to the less-satisfying present. "Harry," she said, "you can't just shrug this off."

"I know," Harry said. The only thing that bothered him about Marcie was that at times she sounded very much like his mother. She went on sounding that way.

"So what are you going to do?"

"Well," Harry said; "the way I see it, I can either stay here and brood. Or I can go out for coffee and brood." He picked a package of doughnuts off a nearby rack. "I think I'll go out for coffee," he said.

And with that he did go out, leaving an exasperated Marcie behind.

That evening, as he did every Wednesday, Harry had dinner at his mother's. As usual the evening started out with a cross-examination.

"You don't look happy, Harry," Mrs. Carlson said. "You and Marcie have a fight or something?"

"No," Harry said, "of course not, Mom."

"That's good." Mrs. Carlson finished setting the table and sat down opposite her son. "You know, Harry," she said, passing him the meat platter, "I can't help but worry about you. Twenty-seven years old and still not settled down. When are you and Marcie going to name the day?"

"When it's time, Mom," Harry said. He speared a pork chop from the platter.

"Sure," Mrs. Carlson said. She frowned as Harry started to put the platter down. "Take another one, Harry. You have to eat if you're going to keep up your strength."

"I eat all right, Mom," Harry said.

"Sure you do," Mrs. Carlson said. "Once a week." She watched until Harry dutifully took a second chop. Then she took the platter back and passed him a large bowl of mashed potatoes. "And speaking of eating," she said, "next time you come bring some of that bread you sell. You know, the twenty-cent kind."

Harry paused with the serving spoon half raised. "I thought you said you only liked bread if it was fresh?"

"That was before it went to fifty-three cents," Mrs. Carlson said. "Honest to God, Harry, I bought a loaf at the supermarket the other day and by the time I got around to using it there wasn't that much difference from that stuff of yours. Not thirty-three cents' worth anyway. Bring some for Mrs. Evans too."

"I will," Harry said. He was so impressed he took a larger helping of mashed potatoes than he'd intended.

The impression lasted, and the next morning he mentioned the incident twice, first to Marcie, then later to Murphy the deliveryman

when he brought the day's quota of leftover bread and cakes. "It's inflation," Harry said as he helped Murphy unload his truck, "finally catching up with North Shore. First the older people, then the housewives."

"You think so, Harry?" Murphy said.

Harry shrugged. "I don't know," he said. "Maybe two swallows don't make a summer, but I sure hope so."

Murphy looked at him pityingly. "Did you ever stop to think why all the regular drivers passed up this—uh—promotion of yours, Harry? It was because they were all smart enough to realize that you couldn't win here no matter what happened. So maybe people do start buying from you. All that means is they're buying less at retail. And what do you think our ever-loving district manager will do when that happens? Take three guesses."

Harry needed only one, and his face showed it. Because one of the main considerations in locating the store here was that there were no retailers handling Honeyloaf in the immediate neighborhood.

Murphy clapped him commiseratingly on the shoulder. "If you're smart," he said, "you'll quit before they fire you. It looks better on the record."

Left to his own decision, Harry would have probably done just that. But before he could make up his mind, fate or luck, or maybe pure blind chance handed him a reprieve. Of a sort, that is. Because two days later Harry slipped on a wet spot on his kitchen floor, tried to catch himself as he fell, and as a result was laid up for weeks with a badly wrenched back.

When he finally got back to work it was the first of the month again. For some reason, though, the day came and went without the usual phone call from Budney. At first Harry thought it was consideration for his recent accident. But then he got a look at the profit-and-loss figures and learned better.

For the first time the store had begun to show a profit. A small one, it was true, but black ink just the same. Better still, there was no matching drop off in the district's retail sales.

"I don't know what you did," he said to Marcie, "but if you promise to keep it up I'll promise to take off more often."

Marcie started to sniffle.

"Hey," Harry said, "there's no reason to cry."

"I be nod crying," Marcie said. "I hab a code."

"That's awful," Harry said. "You ought to be home in bed. I mean it. Take the rest of the day off."

Marcie started to refuse, but then a sneeze interrupted, and in the end she agreed and left for the day.

Which is why Harry happened to be tending the cash register when Chestnut came in.

Not that Harry knew he was Chestnut at the time. All he saw was a small furtive-looking man in a leather jacket and cloth cap glancing apprehensively around the store.

"Where's Marcie?" the man said at last.

"Miss Fleming's sick," Harry said.

"Oh? Who are you then?"

"I'm the manager," Harry said. "Now, look—"

"Oh," the small man said again, but in a completely different tone of voice. "You must be Harry. Yeah, Marcie talked about you a lot." He pointed to himself. "I'm Chestnut," he said. "I came for the order."

Harry looked at him blankly.

"I got a standing order. Didn't Marcie tell you?"

"No," Harry said, "she didn't."

"Don't tell me you're sold out?"

Harry shook his head.

"Whew," Chestnut said. "You had me worried there for a minute. Once before I was a little late getting in and Marcie had to short me twenty-five loaves. You can guess what a sweat that was. Anyway, that's when I went to the standing order. Safer."

"Much," Harry agreed dubiously. "Uh, just how much do you want?"

"A hundred loaves white," Chestnut said, suddenly crisp and businesslike. "And forty-five rye. You got any pumpernickel?"

"Some."

"Gimme twenty of those then. No, better make it fifteen."

Harry nodded, still not sure what he was agreeing to, but agreeing anyway. Then he went off to fill the small man's order.

It took more than several trips to the stockroom but finally Harry had it all together, ringing up the sale and then helping Chestnut carry the bread out to his car, a three-year-old station wagon with no identifying marks or signs.

When Harry went back into the store, a second man in a leather jacket almost identical to Chestnut's stood by the cash register. "Where's Marcie?" the stranger said.

"Marcie," Harry said, "for God's sake, who *are* these men?"

It was two days later. Marcie was back on the job but still sniffing.

She touched a crumpled tissue to her nose. "What men?" she said.

"Little men in leather jackets," Harry said. "A steady stream of them regular as streetcars, and they all know you by name."

"Oh," Marcie said. "Those men." She shrugged. "They aren't anybody, Harry. They're just men who buy bread here, that's all."

"That's all!" Harry said. "Marcie, those men cleaned us out yesterday. And the day before that too. They'll probably clean us out again today."

"Of course they will," Marcie said. "But that's what we're in business for, isn't it? To sell bread." She gave Harry a long curious look. When he had no comeback she touched the tissue to her nose again as if to say that as far as she was concerned that was the end of that.

Harry probably wouldn't have left it there because he didn't like puzzles. But right after that Marcie's men—as he'd come to think of them—started coming in and he got so involved taking care of them that he never got back to it. In fact, it wasn't until he was closing up for the night that he remembered it was Wednesday and that he'd forgotten to set aside any bread for his mother.

The bread shelves were empty now, but fortunately Saul Dubrow's convenience food store across the street was still open and rather than show up empty-handed Harry crossed over to the small grocery and picked up a couple of loaves of Honeyloaf.

Saul's youngest daughter-in-law was tending the cash register. She looked at Harry curiously as he plumped the two loaves down on the checkout counter. "Talk about coals to Newcastle," she said.

"Just checking the competition." Harry accepted his change—a dime and four one-dollar bills from a five—declined a bag and left with his purchases.

He was halfway to his mother's before it hit him.

The next morning Harry waited until he saw the bread delivery truck leave. Then he crossed over again to the small grocery. As he had hoped, this time Saul himself was in the store.

Harry came straight to the point. "Since when did you start carrying Honeyloaf, Saul?"

Saul shrugged. He was a tall spare man in his mid-60's with a lugubrious face and thin graying hair. "A couple of weeks now," he said. "Ever since one of your drivers stopped by and made me an offer I couldn't refuse."

"You're sure it was one of our drivers?"

"He said he was," Saul said. "Should I have questioned him?"

"Maybe you should have, Saul," Harry said. "Because it must have been quite a bargain he offered you if it lets you resell eight cents cheaper than the supermarkets. Didn't that make you suspicious at all?"

"Of course it did," Saul said. "I wasn't born yesterday and I haven't beaten a supermarket price since they invented them. But he had an explanation. Something to do with expanded production and lower unit costs."

"And you believed it?"

"Frankly, Harry," Saul said, "no. I figured the real gimmick was to get me hooked and then raise the price. But I thought why not? When he talks higher price I can always say, 'No, thanks, but it's been nice knowin' you.' " The older man shrugged again. "I have to admit, though, so far he hasn't even mentioned a higher price."

"And he won't either," Harry said. "Because what's happening, Saul, is you're being taken. A bunch of sharpies are buying my discount bread and then reselling it to people like you as fresh."

"That's crazy, Harry," Saul said. "You don't think after all these years in the business I wouldn't know if somebody was passing stale bread off on me? Particularly, as you say, somebody who was offering me a bargain?"

"As a matter of fact," Harry said, "you probably wouldn't. Because you can't tell any more just by squeezing, not with all the preservatives they pump into everything. But there is a way if you know where to look."

He picked up a loaf from the display counter. "They put a little colored mark on all the wrappers as a freshness code. It's how the deliverymen know when to replace. And if you look right here it tells you—" Harry's voice trailed off.

Saul raised an eyebrow. "Tells you what, Harry?" he said.

"It's today's bread," Harry said slowly. "It's fresh bread."

"Don't give up so easily, Harry," Saul said. "Maybe they're counterfeiting wrappers as well."

Harry shook his head absently. "They couldn't," he said. "It would be too expensive."

"So where's the crime then, Mr. Detective?"

Harry shook his head again. "I'm damned if I know," he said.

But now he was more determined than ever to find out, and on Friday he called Marcie at the store to tell her he wouldn't be in. A doctor's appointment, he said, to have his back checked—an ap-

pointment he'd forgotten to mention earlier. He didn't like lying to Marcie, but he wanted her to behave normally when her customers started coming in, and he didn't think she'd be able to if she knew what he really had in mind. Which was to drive down to the store, pick a spot about half a block away, park, wait.

Luckily he didn't have to wait long. Less than half an hour after he'd settled himself in, Chestnut's familiar station wagon pulled up in front of the store. When it pulled out again, laden with its usual stock of bread, Harry followed.

It was the first time Harry had ever tried to tail a car without the other driver knowing it. But luckily again there wasn't much traffic and the small man drove with almost singleminded directness, turning twice and then pulling into a large double garage set well back on a side street.

Harry drove past slowly. Chestnut was already out of the station wagon and closing the garage doors, which prevented Harry from seeing anything inside. But the small man gave no sign he'd recognized Harry. So Harry went on down to the end of the street, made a tight, illegal U-turn, and settled down to wait once more.

Twenty minutes later he was rewarded. The garage doors opened and a truck drove out.

"It was like a bad dream," Harry said. "I followed that truck from store to store until we'd covered every supermarket in that part of town." It was later in the day and Harry was back at the store, sitting at his desk and talking to Marcie who leaned sober-faced against the doorjamb.

"Why a *bad* dream, Harry?" she said.

"Don't you understand?" Harry said. "That was a Honeyloaf truck I followed. Those men who 'buy bread' here. They're company deliverymen, every one of them. And they've got a beautiful little swindle worked out. They pick up their bread at the bakery every morning, just like they're supposed to. But instead of delivering it where they're supposed to, they sell it to small-store owners like Saul. Then they come here and buy our bread to use on their regular routes.

"And it works, because they're so well known there that everybody just takes them for granted. You know, you see your regular route man restocking the store and you just naturally assume he's putting in fresh and taking out old because that's what he's always done. But this time he isn't. He's just substituting one batch of old bread

for another. And it's foolproof. Or almost foolproof," he amended grimly, reaching for the phone.

Marcie sighed. "I was afraid you'd take this attitude, Harry. That's why I didn't tell you."

Harry's hand stopped short of the receiver. "What do you mean," he said, "you didn't tell me before? Marcie! Did you know about this?"

The girl nodded. "Actually," she said, "I'm afraid it was even sort of my idea. Mr. Murphy was helping me one day while you were out and, well, one thing just led to another."

"Oh, God!" Harry said. "Marcie, it's *dishonest*."

"Is it really, Harry? I mean, *really*? Oh, I know, we profit and so do the drivers. But who's hurt? Not the company for sure. They're selling more bread and making more money than ever—although admittedly they don't understand quite why. Not Saul or any of the other small-store owners either. And the supermarkets haven't complained, Harry. Neither have any of their customers. So they can't be hurting too badly if they don't even know it's happening to them."

Harry just shook his head. Marcie looked at him earnestly. "Listen, Harry," she said, "I had to do something! Otherwise we'd have had an 'understanding' for the rest of our lives."

"Marcie—" Harry began. He took a deep breath. "Marcie," he began again. The phone rang, and Harry picked it up quickly, glad of the interruption. "We'll talk about this later," he said to Marcie, who turned and ran from the room. Harry sighed and put the receiver to his ear. "Hello," he said.

"Harry," Budney said. The district manager was fairly bubbling. "You'll never guess what happened, Harry. J. K.—the big man himself—asked me into his office for an advance look at this month's figures. Because we're Number One, Harry. And you know why."

"I have an idea," Harry said carefully.

"Even J. K. commented on it, Harry," Budney said. "A remarkable turnaround, he called it. You didn't let me down, Harry, and I'm not going to let you down either. There's going to be a little something extra in that pay envelope from now on. No, don't thank me, Harry. Just keep that profit showing—and growing."

"Mr. Budney," Harry said, "about that profit . . ."

"Yes, Harry? What about it?"

"Well," Harry said. "Well, you know, things aren't always what they seem—"

"Look, Harry," Budney said, and now he had changed back to the

old; familiar Budney again, "they had better be what they seem or—well, let me put it this way. You just keep on doing what you're doing and everything's going to be just fine. But if you mess me up now—if you lose me Manager of the Year—well, we've talked about that before, haven't we, Harry, and I don't have to tell you what would happen then, do I? So what's it going to be, Harry?"

Harry looked up. Marcie had come back to lean against the door-jamb again. She was smiling and Harry had the distinct impression she'd been listening on the store extension. "Well, Harry?" she said. "What's it going to be?"

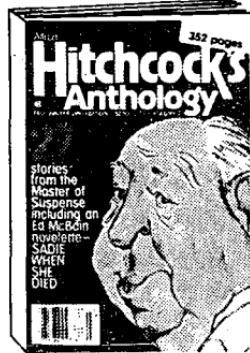
Harry turned back to the phone. "Whatever you say, Mr. Budney."

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Barry Perowne

Raffles on the Riviera

A. J. Raffles, the suave, immaculate, debonair cracksman and cricketer, versus Captain Boris Enani, the suave, immaculate, debonair villain with an ugly card up his sleeve. The hidden card was the threat of scandal in the Principality of Monaco where even the hint, the merest suspicion, of scandal meant polite expulsion from fashionable society—and that was something Raffles would not permit to happen to his sister Dinah . . . Again we take you to the turn of the century, this time in elegant Monte Carlo—with all the authentic color and atmosphere, precise in every stroke and detail, of fin-de-siècle modes and manners. . . .

Criminal: A. J. RAFFLES

The formal opening of the Oceanographic Museum built to house the trophies collected by the Prince of Monaco, famous yachtsman and ichthyologist, was a unique social occasion.

Among the beautifully dressed ladies and grey-toppered gentlemen who had the honour of paying their respects to the genial Prince and his gracious Princess, and of inspecting the exhibits, were A. J. Raffles, his young sister Dinah, and myself, Bunny Manders.

With us, as we sauntered under the outrigger canoes, harpoons, strangely shaped nets, and great fishes suspended from the lofty ceiling of the museum, was Raffles' friend Oppie, a fellow member of a respected London club to which Raffles belonged. It was thanks to Oppie, an influential Riviera resident, that we were present at this remarkable occasion, and he identified for us now some of the celebrities in the fashionable throng.

"There, for instance," he said, "is Mr. Joseph Pulitzer, the great newspaper magnate. And there's Sir Hiram Maxim, inventor of the automatic gun. The dapper gentleman he's talking to is Signor Guglielmo Marconi, joint winner last year of the Nobel Prize for Physics."

"No novelist, Dinah," said Raffles, "knows more about this Principality and the mysteries, intrigues, and hidden passions of the cosmopolitan society of the Riviera coast than good old Oppie."

"Oh, I know," said Dinah to Oppie. "Your novels are my favourites, because you set your plots in such beautiful, worldly places."

The novelist smiled at her. Urbane and experienced, he was an epicure of life's graces, and Dinah, with her fair hair and grey eyes, her lacy dress, becoming little hat, and the pretty parasol and small gold-mesh purse she carried, was a creditable young sister for Raffles to have.

"I'm sure your brother takes too good care of you, Miss Dinah," said Oppie, "for you ever to figure in the kind of plot I conjure from the air of this delectable coast. But if you'll excuse me, I must have a word with Sir Hiram Maxim. He's published a small book 'on the mathematics of roulette, and there's a point in it I'd like to take up with him. I'll be on the look-out for you at the Casino this evening."

As Oppie left us, Raffles drew the attention of Dinah and myself to the glass-topped specimen-case beside which we were standing. The case displayed, on a bed of sand, various shells and lumps of amber, together with starfish, coral, and oysters.

"You see, Dinah?" Raffles said. "Each of these oysters reveals a different stage in the process by which an intrusive grain of sand is transformed into a worthwhile end result."

"What a lovely end result!" Dinah exclaimed. "A beautiful big pearl! D'you think it's a real one?"

"That's a good question," said Raffles.

Immaculate, his keen face tanned, he was about to subject the exhibit to a more searching scrutiny when we were approached by a footman in the princely Grimaldi livery.

"Oh, look!" said Dinah, as we accepted glasses of champagne from the footman's proffered tray. "There's a notice over the doorway there saying: *To the Turtles*. Shall we go and see if they're live ones?"

"Why not?" said Raffles.

Taking our champagne with us, we passed through a low doorway, went down some narrow steps cut in rock, and found ourselves in a cavern. From iron-barred window apertures sun shone in onto a pool in the rock floor of the cavern. Four large turtles were swimming around in the pool, but their splashings were drowned by an intermittent surging sound which filled the cavern with hollow echoes.

The surging came from a round hole in a corner of the floor. A waist-high rail surrounded the hole and, when we looked down into it, it was like looking down a well with sea and sunshine at the bottom of it.

"A natural rock-shaft," said Raffles, "a sea blowhole."

Impelled by some ground-swell, the sea quenched the sunshine, deep down there, and came seething about halfway up the hole, then sank down to admit sunshine again into the sea-filled cavern.

"I'd hate to fall down there," said Dinah.

"Your arrival in the Grimaldi Deep, mademoiselle," said a voice from behind us, "would make the mermaids jealous."

We turned. A man was standing there. In tailcoat and grey topper, a glass of champagne in one hand, the other hand behind his back, he was strikingly handsome, in his early thirties. And he was drunk.

Swaying slightly on his feet, he totally ignored Raffles and me.

"Have you not yet missed, mademoiselle," he said, his heavy-lidded dark eyes on Dinah, "something you put down on a specimen-case upstairs, the better to accept a glass of champagne?"

He took his hand from behind his back.

"Oh!" Dinah exclaimed. "My purse! Thank you very much."

She would have taken the purse, but he did not let go of it.

"Captain Boris Enani," he said, still holding the purse. And Dinah, too, was holding it, and she looked a little startled as Captain Enani, faintly smiling at her, sipped his champagne, clearly with no intention of releasing the purse until he got a response to his introduction of himself.

But, in Raffles' eyes, his sister Dinah was taboo to men who approached her when they were drunk and who looked at her as admiringly as this Captain Boris Enani was looking at her.

"Thank you," Raffles said. "I will take the purse."

He took it, firmly, from both of them. He handed the purse to Dinah, took her arm, and, turning his back and hers on Captain Enani, moved away with her towards the steps up from the cavern.

"So?" said Enani, deprived of introductions. He gulped the rest of his champagne. "So!" he said, with an ugly look at me, and he hurled his glass into the turtles' pool.

I ignored him and followed Raffles and Dinah to the steps, where a man standing a little way up moved aside courteously to let us pass on up and re-enter the museum.

Finding that the Prince and Princess were now gone and that the guests were leaving, we went on out into the blaze of sunshine,

where Dinah opened her pretty parasol. On tall flagstaffs, pink-striped white banners bearing the golden Grimaldi blazon shimmered in the heat-currents, and glossy carriages were jingling away with the cream of Riviera society.

We ourselves had not far to go, for Raffles had obtained, from a rich acquaintance in England, the loan of a house—with its resident domestic staff—called the Villa Sappho. It was one of a number of pleasant villas dotted about, amid date-palms and massed blossoms, on the slope that dropped away steeply before us to the blue water of the harbour, where many fine yachts lay spotlessly white at their moorings. On its eminence at the far side of the harbour stood the elaborate white casino.

As, with Dinah between Raffles and myself, we strolled down the path to the Villa Sappho, Dinah said, "What a strange man, that Captain Enani!"

Raffles said nothing.

"Didn't you think so, Bunny?" Dinah asked me.

"A most curious man, Dinah," I concurred.

"Dear Bunny, what an agreeable person you are!" said Dinah, and she tucked her arm in mine.

But Raffles said nothing.

That evening, as we dined, just the three of us, at a candlelit table on the terrace of the Villa Sappho, I sensed a certain reserve between Raffles and Dinah. It made me a bit uneasy, for really they knew very little about each other.

They had grown up separately, owing to their parents' early demise, and had quite lost touch with each other—until Dinah suddenly had taken it into her head to leave the shelter of her guardian's roof and join her brother in London.

"What a problem, Bunny!" Raffles had said to me, at the time. "I shall have to do something for her, of course. I'm her only relative. But, good God, I'm a dangerous brother for a girl to have! I may have Scotland Yard on my track any day. I'm currently England's cricket captain and, if I should be exposed as a criminal, there'll be an appalling scandal. It could affect Dinah's chances in life. The best thing I can do for her is take her abroad and amass a dowry for her, so that I can get her safely married into some European family of sound social and financial standing—while the going's still good!"

Accordingly, he had borrowed the Villa Sappho—where, as we sat

now at dinner, we were waited on by the discreet, white-jacketed houseman, Latouche. He, his wife Marie-Claire, who cooked admirably, and their daughter Fanchon, the parlourmaid, constituted the resident domestic staff of the villa.

Because of the slight strain I sensed in the atmosphere between Raffles and Dinah, I was rather relieved when, Latouche having brought us our coffee and liqueurs and gone back in through the French windows, Dinah said she thought she would not come with us to the Casino, but would have an early night.

"Sleep well, my dear Dinah," said Raffles.

It was a warm night, the sky splendid with stars, as he and I walked together, in evening-dress but hatless, past the harbour where the yacht-lights twinkled, towards the brilliantly illuminated Casino.

"The question is, Bunny," Raffles said abruptly, "did Dinah leave her purse on that specimen-case by mere oversight? Or had she noticed that fellow Enani staring at her? Was she intrigued by him? Did she leave her purse behind deliberately—to give him an excuse to make her acquaintance?"

"Raffles," I said, startled, "that hadn't occurred to me!"

"For the simple reason," Raffles said, "that you know no more about the character of my sister Dinah than I do."

I knew this much—that I was in love with her. But I dared not let Raffles suspect it. If one day he should stand in the dock at the Old Bailey, it was odds on that I should be standing there beside him. So I was far from being the kind of suitor he was seeking for Dinah, and I had to watch my step.

I pointed out to him now that, if he knew little about his own sister, she knew as little about him.

"In fact, Raffles," I said, "I think she's been wondering about all the expensive clothes and things you've bought her. Anyway, she asked me something, the other day, that I don't think she quite likes to ask you personally."

"What did she ask you, Bunny?"

"She asked me where your money came from."

"Did she, by God! What did you tell her?"

"Oh, I fobbed her off, Raffles. I told her it was difficult for a girl to understand a gentleman's financial arrangements—especially if he's England's cricket captain—and I advised her not to bother her head about such tedious matters."

"What did she say?"

"She said she wouldn't."

"Well done, Bunny," Raffles said. "But if she feels some sort of attraction to this Captain Boris Enani, I want to know something about the fellow—and if anybody can give us chapter and verse on Riviera characters, it's my fellow clubman Oppie, who said he'd be at the Casino this evening."

But the first person we saw, when we entered the Casino's spacious foyer, all glittering chandeliers, red plush banquettes, and gilt-rich walls, was not Oppie. It was Captain Boris Enani.

"Over there, at the *vestiaire* counter," Raffles murmured to me. "If he sees us, pay no attention to him."

Out of the corner of my eye, as we collected our *cartes d'entrée* from the three liveried functionaries at the high desk, I saw Enani on the far side of the foyer. His back was to us. In evening-dress, hatless, his hair ash-blond, he was collecting a white silk scarf from the *vestiaire*. People were going to and fro, passing in and out.

Enani turned, putting his scarf on carelessly. He was swaying slightly, drunk again. But he saw us. I felt him staring after us as, paying no attention to him, we crossed to the arch of the atrium, where a man stood aside courteously to let us pass through to the roulette tables.

"Enani's gone, Bunny," Raffles murmured, casting a quick glance back over his shoulder as he offered me a Sullivan from his cigarette-case.

"He's drunk again," I remarked.

"Yes," Raffles said thoughtfully. "Very. Keep an eye open for Oppie."

Throngs four deep surrounded the roulette tables in the atrium. Jewels glittered, starched shirtfronts gleamed. Through the restrained hum of voices sounded the ritual chanting of the croupiers as their ebony rakes slid towers of gold louis and stacks of banknotes to and fro across the green cloths, watched over by the *chefs-de-partie* on their high rostrums at each table. Here and there, against the panelled walls, lurked keen-eyed men in evening-dress.

"Oppie country," Raffles murmured to me, "the most discreetly policed Casino in the world."

We wandered from table to table, trying a stake here and there, but it was not our night, and I was glad when Oppie joined us. We had a drink with him in a small bar off the foyer, and Raffles asked him if he knew anything about a Captain Boris Enani. The novelist nodded.

"I've been watching the baccarat in the *salles privées*," he said, "the shrine of the Golden Goat. Enani was in there just now, playing against the Greek Syndicate's bank. He left, about an hour ago, with a pocketful of their money."

"Did he now," Raffles said softly. "Tell me, Oppie, is it true that the Casino has a big winner shadowed to make sure he reaches safely wherever he's going?"

"Yes, that's true of a big winner, Raffles. But Enani's win, the equivalent of about three thousand pounds—bank-notes—wasn't enough to warrant that service." The author lighted a cigar, his shrewd eyes, under strongly marked black brows, studying Raffles. "What's your interest in Enani?"

"His interest," Raffles said, "in my young sister Dinah. And hers—possibly—in him."

"Ah! Then your question has merit, Raffles. Women are Boris Enani's—hobby. Women and cards. He's believed to be the bye-blow, the illegitimate son of a Balkan king, and to receive a handsome allowance so long as he stays out of his own country and involves himself in no political plots against his royal sire."

"An Oppie character, in fact," Raffles said.

"Yes," said the novelist, "I must hatch a plot I can use him in, one of these days. 'Lucky at cards,' they say, 'unlucky in love.' That doesn't seem to be true of Boris Enani. He wins both ways. Several Riviera ladies of previously unblemished repute are rumoured to have succumbed to his slumbrous charm. One wonders if the lucky Lothario has some extra card up his sleeve—when he plays games with the fair sex."

"Oppie," Raffles said, "many thanks for this information."

"From one clubman to another," said Oppie. "I'm going back to the *salles privées*. Are you and Manders coming?"

But Raffles excused us, and, as the novelist left us, gave me a hard look. "An extra card, Bunny?" Raffles said. "I wonder. If Enani took a quick look into Dinah's purse this morning, he'd have found cards in it—visiting-cards that I had printed for her, with the address of the Villa Sappho. When he saw us here at the Casino—*without* Dinah—can he have thought it, drunk as he was, a good opportunity to pay a private call on her?" He stood up abruptly. "Let's get back to the villa."

As we walked briskly down the sloping road from the Casino, with the harbour lights reflected in the water on our left, a *fiacre* was coming up the slope. I heard the passenger call to the cabbie to stop.

The horse jingled to a standstill level with us. Dinah, in an evening cloak, the hood thrown back, her hair fair in the light from the white globe of the streetlamp, looked out at us.

"I'm so glad I've found you!" she said.

Raffles told the cabbie to take us to the Villa Sappho. We got into the *fiacre* with Dinah, and Raffles asked her if Enani had come to the villa, and she said that he had—about half an hour after we had left.

"So he lost no time," Raffles said, "after he saw us in the Casino, Bunny. Dinah, did you let Latouche admit him?"

"The Latouches weren't there," she said. "Their other daughter, Fanchon's married sister, was having a birthday party, so I told them they could go to it."

Over the clip-clop of the horse's hoofs and the harness jingle, the cabbie on his box, his back to us, could not possibly hear her voice as Dinah told us that, when the Latouches had left, she had gone into her bedroom. She had opened the curtains and stepped out to the balcony.

"It was all so pretty," she told us, "the stars, and the lights in the harbour and over in the Casino. I could hear the crickets in our garden and music in the distance."

After a few minutes she had gone back into her bedroom, leaving the French windows ajar, but closing the curtains. As she started to get ready for bed, she had heard a sound on the balcony. The curtains had parted. Captain Enani had stepped in.

"I told him to leave at once," Dinah said, "or my brother would kill him."

I knew that was true, for I knew Raffles, and though he said not a word, the hair stirred on my scalp.

"But you can't kill him now," Dinah said, and she drew in her breath, deeply, with a tremor in it. "He's dead."

Hoofs clopped, harness jingled. Dinah told us that Enani had seized her hands, covered them with kisses. She had told him he was mad or drunk or both, and had wrenched her hands free.

"And then?" Raffles said, very softly.

My heart thumped. How could Dinah have killed the man? With what weapon? Pistol? Scissors? But no, she told us that Enani had taken from the pocket of his white waistcoat a small phial of pills. Poison, he had said. One kiss from her lips, he had said, or he would kill himself in her bedroom and the scandal would ruin her.

"And then?" said Raffles.

"I told him he was mad and a coward," Dinah said, "and would never do it. But—he did! He swallowed one of the pills. He had—a sort of seizure. He contorted. He fell back across my bed. I couldn't believe it! I ran out and came to find you."

Raffles took her hand.

"Dinah," he said, "those pills, of course, were about as lethal as sugar candy. If, from fear of scandal, you'd paid that man his ransom of a kiss, he wouldn't have stopped at that. But you called his bluff. I'm surprised he bothered to go through with his charade. Don't worry, Dinah. When we get to the villa, we'll find him gone—but he'll have to go a long, long way before he escapes settlement of this little account I have with him."

He laughed, without mirth.

"You see, Bunny?" he said to me. "We're in a Principality where scandal is inadmissible. It means, for those involved, whether innocent or guilty, polite expulsion. If it becomes rumoured that one is *persona non grata* in the Principality of Monaco and Monte Carlo, one is no longer received anywhere in good society. So we now know the extra card up Boris Enani's sleeve in his games with women—the ugly card of scandal. For fear of it, women yield to him—and afterwards, from the same fear, keep silent."

The *fiacre* pulled up at the gate of the Villa Sappho. Raffles paid off the cabbie. In the house the lights were on. The Latouches were not yet back. All was still.

"To put your mind at rest, Dinah," Raffles said, "I'll just take a look into your bedroom. Wait here in the salôn."

He went upstairs to Dinah's room. I followed him. Her bedroom door stood wide open. The lights were on. Raffles stopped dead on the threshold. Over his shoulder I saw Enani. He lay sprawled on his back across Dinah's bed. Raffles moved forward, into the room. I followed, staring, unbelieving.

Enani's hands were clamped on the bed coverlet, his face was congested and mottled, his jaw fallen; his bulging eyes gleamed blindly in the light.

Raffles stooped over the bed, slid a hand under the breast of Enani's dinner-coat, sniffed the man's mouth.

"Close those curtains, Bunny."

The window-curtains were slightly parted. I closed the gap and turned. Raffles was picking up from the carpet a small phial of pills and its cork. He corked the phial, pocketed it, and went back downstairs. I followed.

Dinah was standing in the salon, an intent question in her eyes. "Dinah," Raffles said, "Bunny and I have a little job to do before the Latouches get back. We won't be long. Sit down. Don't worry. Bunny, give her a brandy."

While I poured Dinah the drink, Raffles crossed to the *escritoire* and let down the flap. He wrapped his handkerchief round his hand, took from the pigeonholes some sheets of notepaper, held them up to the light, then pocketed them. He took from a pigeonhole a small pot of gum with the brush-handle protruding through the top. He pocketed the pot of gum, then tucked his handkerchief back into the breast-pocket of his dinner-coat.

He ran back upstairs. I followed. He went into his own bedroom, returned in a moment, pocketing a pair of black kid gloves. He handed me a pair, told me to put them in my pocket, and went back into Dinah's room. I followed.

"What do you intend to do?" I said. I could hardly breathe.

"I intend to do the only thing that can prevent a scandal that would ruin my plans for Dinah's future," Raffles said. "I intend an act of oblivion. Come on, up with him!"

We lugged Enani up off the bed and, each taking one of his arms around our shoulders, carried him, facing forward between us, his head lolling on his shirtfront, the ends of his white silk scarf dangling, his feet dragging like a comatose inebriate's down the stairs and out to the garden gate.

"A warm night, a starry night," Raffles said, "and not much past eleven o'clock. There'll be people strolling by the sea or sitting at the sidewalk tables of the seafront cafés. So every access to the briny is useless to us, Bunny—except, let's hope, just one."

I knew now where we were going as we bore Enani up the sloping path which we had followed, both up it and down it, that very morning. Here and there, among the date-palms on either side of the path, shone the white globes of lamp-standards. Crickets chirred tranquilly amid the blossoms. We saw nobody. We had not far to go before the Oceanographic Museum loomed up before us, its lofty windows reflecting starshine.

The building stood on a slope, so the rear windows were more accessible than those in front; and at the rear of the building we laid Enani down.

"There may or may not be a watchman in the building," Raffles murmured, as we put on our gloves. "We've got to risk it."

He held a sheet of notepaper to the glass of the window before

which we stood. He brushed gum over the paper, reversed it, and pressed the paper to the glass. This was not the first time I had seen him use the little implement he carried, which had a diamond cutting-edge. It squeaked slightly as he etched it around the paper.

He gave a corner of the paper a sharp tap with the implement. A fragment of glass fell inward, scarcely audible. He inserted the implement into the hole and levered the square of glass gently outward. It came, adhering to the paper, with a slight cracking sound. He laid the glass on the ground and reached in to the window-latch. The window opened inward, and Raffles went in, soundless, over the sill.

I heaved Enani up and, between us, we lifted him inside.

"Hold him," Raffles whispered, and was gone.

Starshine glimmered down through the skylights of the lofty ceiling. Here and there, from the glass-topped specimen-cases, gleamed points of phosphorescence, as of glow-worms. From a dark doorway to my right sounded faint splashes and an intermittent surging sound. A shadow moved. Raffles was back.

"When the broken window's found, Bunny," he whispered, "the police will wonder what the intruder was after. It's advisable to give them a reason, so I've picked the lock of the oyster-case and taken the exhibit 'pearl.' The police will think, let's hope, that the intruder was gullible enough to think it a *real* pearl. It should give them a laugh. Now, let's do what we're really here for."

Between us we carried Enani through the dark doorway, down the narrow steps, into the turtles' cavern. In the faint starlight from the iron-barred window-apertures facing seaward, the turtles splashed restlessly in their pool. The intermittent surge of the sea in the blowhole filled the cavern with hollow echoes.

"Lay him down for a minute," Raffles said. "There's something I want from him."

"Of course!" Belatedly, the thought flashed upon me as we laid Enani down on the rock-floor and Raffles dropped on one knee beside him. "His baccarat winnings!" I said.

"Bunny," Raffles said, his hand busy at Enani's collar, "when I felt for his heartbeat, back there in Dinah's room, I felt also for his bank-notes. He had neither the one nor the other."

He stood up. I glimpsed in his hand Enani's white silk scarf.

"Now, come on," Raffles said. "Up with him!"

He pocketed the scarf. Together we lifted Enani over the waist-high rail surrounding the blowhole. For a moment we held him, by

his ankles, suspended over eternity. Then we let him go, and I heard the sea surge up the dark shaft to receive him.

"And this false pearl can follow him," Raffles said.

He tossed the exhibit down the shaft, and we stole back up the rock steps and left the cavern to the restless Grimaldi turtles.

But what had happened to Boris Enani's baccarat winnings? And why had Raffles taken Enani's white silk scarf?

There were questions in my head, and forebodings, when I went down in the morning to breakfast on the terrace of the Villa Sappho.

Sleek in his white jacket, Latouche was setting down on the table a tray bearing crisp croissants and fragrant coffee.

"*Mademoiselle et messieurs sont servi,*" he said, and with his discreet smile and a slight bow went back in through the French windows.

The sky was blue. Monaco lay spread before us, with its fine buildings and harbourful of yachts, a haven of riches, tranquil in the opaline glory of the Mediterranean morning.

I noticed faint, violet shadows under Dinah's grey eyes as she poured the coffee, but Raffles, in a light suit, a pearl in his cravat, seemed his usual easy-going self.

He suggested that we lunch at the Café de Paris, opposite the Casino.

"One sees such interesting people going to and fro past that corner," he said. "It is to Monaco as the corner of the Rue de la Paix is to Paris—everyone passes it sooner or later."

At a table under a sun-umbrella on the café terrace, thronged with the usual gay, fashionable crowd, we lingered long over lunch, watching the comings and goings of the Principality's citizens and visitors.

Dinah grew restless. "Why don't we go somewhere else?" she asked.

"Personally," said Raffles, "I like this corner. But, Bunny, why don't you take Dinah to see the *Jardin Exotique*? It's said to have a thousand varieties of cactus."

To my surprise Dinah fell in with this suggestion, and I understood why, a little later. For, as we strolled together, Dinah with her pretty parasol raised, along a path through that high-up, prickly garden of rust-red and yellow blossoms, she asked me a question.

She said, "Bunny, what became—last night—of Captain Enani?"

"Dinah," I said, "your brother would like you to put Captain Enani

out of your mind. He won't be bothering you again."

She was silent for a while, as we wandered on, then she said, "I believe my brother thinks I left my purse on that specimen-case in the museum *deliberately*. But, Bunny, I didn't."

"I'm glad, Dinah," I said. "Thank you for telling me that."

"It's strange," she said. "Sometimes I think I love my brother. But sometimes—I'm not sure."

"That, Dinah," I explained, "is because you don't yet know him as well as I do."

"What a loyal person you are, Bunny!" she said, with a smile, and she linked her arm with mine.

It was a way she had, but I wished she would not do it to me, for her touch set up a cardiac turbulence in me, and in Raffles' eyes she was no less taboo to me than she had been to the late Boris Enani. In the circumstances, as I did not trust myself when alone with Dinah, I thought it prudent to suggest that it was time we rejoined her brother.

But Raffles was gone from the café opposite the Casino. Nor did we find him at the Villa Sappho when we returned there. So I was alone with Dinah, willy-nilly, all through dinner, which we had at the candlelit table on the villa terrace.

I found it so hard to keep my eyes off Dinah that, as the hour grew late, I was relieved when she decided to retire. I saw her light come on, in a window upstairs. She was not now using the bedroom in which Boris Enani had played out his tragic farce. I watched her window. Once or twice, across the curtains, I saw her shadow pass. Taboo!

Crickets chirred in the garden. The lights of Monaco twinkled. I must have drowsed. Suddenly a hand fell on my shoulder and I sprang to my feet.

"It's all right, Bunny," Raffles said. "Come inside. Bring the brandy."

I followed him into the salon. He closed the French windows, drew the curtains together, crossed to the door, opened it, listened for a moment, then shut the door. He poured himself a brandy.

"Bunny," he said, "d'you remember the courteous gentleman who stood aside for us to pass through the atrium arch to the roulette tables in the Casino?"

"Vaguely," I said. "I hardly noticed him."

"D'you remember," Raffles said, sitting down in an easy-chair, "that when Oppie told us Enani had about three thousand pounds

in baccarat winnings on him, I asked if the Casino had a big winner followed—for his own safety?"

"Yes. But Oppie said Enani wasn't a big enough winner for that."

"So," said Raffles, "the courteous gentleman, who gave me a distinct impression that he was following Enani when Enani left the Casino, wasn't a Casino agent. But I had a feeling I'd seen that courteous gentleman before. And I remembered where. He was the same man who stood politely aside for us on the steps up from the turtles' cavern after that little scene in the morning, when Enani returned Dinah's gold-mesh purse."

Raffles drank his brandy, lighted a Sullivan.

"You see, Bunny?" Raffles said. "If the courteous gentleman was keeping an eye on Enani in the morning, when he had no baccarat winnings on him, it wasn't for the money that Enani was followed out of the Casino in the evening. So what was the courteous gentleman following Enani for?"

"Raffles," I breathed, "I can't imagine!"

"Neither could I," Raffles said wryly. "But I was certain that the courteous gentleman *did* follow Enani from the Casino. And Enani came straight here to the Villa Sappho. Dinah was on her balcony—like Juliet. So the courteous gentleman saw Enani, that evil Romeo, watching Dinah from the garden. And saw him pull himself up on to the balcony and enter her room. And the courteous gentleman himself climbed to the balcony. Through the gap in the curtains he watched the scene between Enani and Dinah. He saw Enani collapse on the bed—and Dinah run out of the room."

Raffles took a small phial of pills from his pocket.

"Am I giving you a headache, Bunny? Try one of Enani's pills. I've tried one myself. They're aspirin."

"But Enani was *dead* on Dinah's bed!"

"Yes, Bunny," Raffles said. "But it was pretty evident, from his face, that he hadn't died of poison. There was never the slightest chance that Enani would have swallowed one of those pills if they'd been poison. No, Bunny, when Enani played out his ugly farce and 'collapsed,' and Dinah ran out, Enani started drunkenly to get up off the bed—but the courteous gentleman came at him through the curtains. Bunny, Enani died of strangulation."

Raffles poured himself another brandy.

"I'm much obliged to the courteous gentleman, Bunny. But I wanted to see him again. So I watched for him from the terrace of the Café de Paris on that corner everyone in Monaco must pass

sooner or later. And he passed by about an hour after you took Dinah to the *Jardin Exotique*."

"You followed him?" I said, my throat dry.

"To a street called the Rue des Oliviers," Raffles said. "The courteous gentleman has a small office there. He stayed in it rather a long time. When he left, I went in—with the aid of the little picklock I carry. In the office was a metal filing-cabinet—locked. I got it open. I found a thick file in it—carbon copies of reports, in French, on Boris Enani, over the past eighteen months."

"Reports?" I said.

"Addressed," said Raffles, "to a postbox number in a Balkan capital. The reports told all, Bunny. Enani is the bye-blow of a royal person—who's had him watched, got tired of his doings and the expense of his fat allowance, and ordered the royal agent, that courteous gentleman, to remove the nuisance. And the courteous gentleman saw his opportunity when he witnessed the scene in Dinah's room."

Raffles looked at me with a dancing vivacity in his eyes.

"Incidentally, Bunny," he said, "the courteous gentleman treated himself to a bonus. It was locked in his metal filing-cabinet. Catch!"

He tossed me a thick sheaf of bank-notes held together by a paper band.

"Enani's baccarat winnings," he said, "and a good start for amassing a dowry for Dinah, after you've taken your share."

"No," I said, twisting the arrow in my own heart. "All for Dinah's dowry."

I handed him back the bank-notes. He gave me a strange look.

"All right, Bunny," he said quietly. "I shall remember." His tone changed. "Anyway, I left a receipt in the courteous gentleman's filing-cabinet. It seemed only right that he should have a receipt for this three thousand pounds. So I left him the thing he strangled Enani with. I left him," said Raffles, with a wicked look, "Enani's white silk scarf."

The door-handle turned. My heart stopped. The bank-notes vanished into Raffles' pocket. The door opened and Dinah was standing there. She came in. She was in *negligée*, her fair hair in two braids, her grey eyes, so like his own, on Raffles.

"I couldn't fall asleep till I knew you were back," she said to him. "Then I heard you talking in here."

"And did you," said Raffles gently, taking a Sullivan from his cigarette-case, "hear what we were talking about?"

"Why, no," said Dinah. "What was it?"

"We were talking," Raffles said, "about the kind of plot of mystery, intrigue, and passion that your favourite novelist conjures from the air of this delectable Principality. I ran into him an hour ago. He was coming out of the Casino, so we had a nightcap together. He's invited you and Bunny and me to tea to-morrow—or, rather, to-day—on his yacht."

"On his yacht? Oh, how-exciting!" Dinah exclaimed. "I've never had tea on a yacht before. What d'you think I should wear?"

Her brother smiled.

"That's a good question, Dinah. Your favourite author knows all the best people, so you'll probably meet some of them on board. In the circumstances, and I'm sure Bunny will agree with me, there'll be no danger of our breaking the bank if we take you shopping in the morning for something especially attractive for you to wear," said A. J. Raffles, "at the tea-party with Oppie—with Mr. E. Phillips Oppenheim."

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Richard Matheson

Needle in the Heart

Do you believe in voodoo? No, we suppose you don't. But "there are more things in heaven and earth," dear reader, "than are dreamt of in your philosophy" . . .

April 23: At last I have found a way to kill Therese. I am so happy I could cry. To end that vile dominion after all these years! What is the phrase?—" 'tis a consummation devoutly to be wish'd." Well, I have wished it long enough. Now it is time to act. I will destroy Therese and regain my peace of mind. I will!

What distresses me is that the book has been here in our library all these years. Why, I could have done it ages ago!—avoiding all the agonies and cruel humiliations I have borne. Still, I must not think like that. I must be grateful I found it at all. *And amused*—how droll it really is!—that Therese was actually in the library with me when I came across the book.

She, of course, was poring avidly over one of the many volumes of pornography left by Father. I shall burn them all after I have killed Therese. Thank God our mother died before he started to collect them. Vile man that he was. Therese loved him to the end, of course. She is just like him really—brutish, carnal, and disgusting. Oh, I will sing for joy the day she dies.

Yes, there she was, below, darkly flushed with sensuality while I, attempting to avoid the sight of her, moved about on the balcony where the older volumes were kept. And there I found it on an upper shelf, a film of gray dust on its pages. *Voodoo: An Authentic Study* by Dr. William Moriarity. It had been printed privately. The Lord only knows where or when Father acquired it.

The astounding thing: I perused it, bored, then actually put it back in place! It was not until I had walked away from it and glanced through many other books that, suddenly, it came to me.

I could kill Therese by use of voodoo!

April 25: My hand is trembling as I write this. I have almost

completed the doll which represents Therese—yes, almost completed it. I have made it from the cloth of one of her old dresses which I found in the attic. I have used two tiny jeweled buttons for its eyes. There is more to do, of course, but the project is at last under way.

I am amused to consider what Dr. Ramsay would say if he discovered my plans. What would his initial reaction be? That I am foolish to believe in voodoo? Or that I must learn to live with Therese if not to love her. Love that *pig*? Never! How I despise her! If I could—believe me—I would happily surrender my half of Father's estate if it would mean that I would never have to see her dissipated face again, never have to listen to her drunken swearing, to her tales of lewd adventuring.

But that is quite impossible. She will not leave me be. I have but one course left to me—to destroy her. And I shall. *I shall*.

Therese has only one more day to live.

*April 26: I have it all now—all! Therese took a bath before she left tonight—to Lord knows what debaucheries. After the bath she cut her nails. And now I have them fastened to the doll with thread. And I have made the doll a head of hair from the strands I laboriously combed from Therese's brush. Now the doll truly *is* Therese. That is the beauty of voodoo. I hold Therese's life in my hands, free to choose, for myself, the moment of her destruction. I will wait and savor that delicious freedom.*

What will Dr. Ramsay say when Therese is dead? What *can* he say? That I am mad to think voodoo had killed her? (Not that I will ever tell him.) But it will! I will not lay a hand on her—as much as I would like to do it personally, crushing the breath from her throat. But no. I will survive. That is the joy of it—to kill Therese willfully and yet to live! That is the utter ecstasy of it!

Tomorrow night. Let her enjoy her last adventure. No more will she stagger in, her breath a reeking fume of whiskey, to regale me in lurid detail with the foul obscenities she had committed and enjoyed. No more will she—oh, I cannot wait! I shall thrust a needle deep into the doll's heart, rid myself of her forever. Damn Therese, *damn* her!

I shall kill her now!

From the notebook of John H. Ramsay, M.D.

April 27: Poor Millicent is dead. Her housekeeper found her crum-

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pled on the floor of her bedroom this morning, clutching at her heart, a look of shock and agony frozen on her face. A heart attack, no doubt. No marks on her. Beside her, on the floor, was a tiny cloth doll with a needle piercing it. Poor Millicent. Had she some brain-sick notion of destroying me with voodoo? I had hoped she trusted me. Still, why should she have? I could never have helped her really. Hers was a hopeless situation. Millicent Therese Marlow suffered from the most advanced case of multiple personality it has ever been my misfortune to observe . . .

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James Holding

The Mutilated Scholar

Hal Johnson, the Library Cop, the Collector of Overdues and the Nemesis of Vanished Volumes, proves that sometimes you can make a mountain out of a molehill. The Bookhunter at his book-hunting and manhunting best . . .

Detective: HAL JOHNSON

I was standing in the rear of a crowded bus when I caught sight of the stolen library book.

It was the wildest coincidence, the sheerest accident. For I don't ride a bus even twice a year. And normally I can't tell one copy of a particular library book from another.

I craned my neck to get a clearer view past the fellow hanging onto a bus strap beside me. And I knew immediately that I wasn't making any mistake. That library book tucked under the arm of the neatly dressed girl a few seats forward was, without a doubt, one of the 52 library books which had been in the trunk of my old car when it was stolen six weeks before. The police had recovered my car three days later. The books, however, were missing—until I spotted this one on the bus.

Maybe I'd better explain how I recognized it.

As a library cop, I run down overdue and stolen books for the Public Library. I'd been collecting overdues that day, and about eleven in the morning I'd got back a bunch of books from a wealthy old lady who'd borrowed them from the library to read on a round-the-world cruise. She couldn't have cared less when I told her how much money in fines she owed the library after ten weeks' delinquency. And she couldn't have cared less, either, when I taxed her with defacing one of the books.

It was a novel called THE SCHOLAR, and she'd deliberately—in an idle moment on the cruise, no doubt—made three separate burns on the cover with the end of her cigarette, to form two eyes and a

nose inside the O-of the word SCHOLAR. I was pretty irritated with her, because that sort of thing is in the same class with drawing mustaches on subway-poster faces, so I charged her two bucks for defacing the book in addition to the fine for overdue. You can see why I'd remember that particular copy of THE SCHOLAR.

I scrutinized the girl now holding it under her arm on the bus. She certainly didn't look like the kind of girl who goes around stealing old cars and Public Library books. She was maybe 30 years old, well-dressed in a casual way, with a pretty, high-cheekboned face and taffy-colored (dyed?) hair, stylishly coiffured.

A crowded bus wasn't exactly the best place to brace her about the book. Nevertheless I began to squeeze my way toward her between the jammed passengers.

I wanted to know about that book because I still winced every time I recalled the mirth of Lieutenant Randall of the Police Department when I called him that first day to report the theft of my car and books. First he had choked with honest laughter, then he accused me of stealing my own library books so I could make myself look good by finding them again, and finally he offered to bet I had sunk my car in the river somewhere so I could collect the insurance on it. The idea of a book detective being robbed of his own books sent him into paroxysms. It was understandable. I used to work for him and he's always needled me about quitting the police to become a "sissy" library cop.

The girl with the book was seated near the center doors of the bus. I managed to maneuver my way to a standing position in front of her, leaned over, and in a friendly voice said, "Excuse me, Miss. Would you mind telling me where you got that library book you're holding?"

Her head tilted back and she looked up at me, startled. "What?" she said in a surprised contralto.

"That book," I said, pointing to THE SCHOLAR. "My name is Hal Johnson and I'm from the Public Library and I wonder if you'd mind telling me where—"

That was as far as I got. She glanced out the window, pulled the cord to inform the bus driver of her desire to get off, and as she squeezed by me toward the center doors of the bus she said, "Excuse me, this is my stop. This book is just one I got in the usual—"

The rest of what she said was lost in the sound of the bus doors swishing open. The girl went lithely down the two steps to the sidewalk and made off at a brisk pace. I was too late to follow her

out of the bus before the doors closed, but I prevailed on the driver to reopen them with some choice abuse about poor citizens who were carried blocks beyond their stops by insensitive bus drivers who didn't keep the doors open long enough for a fast cat to slip through them.

While I carried on my dispute with the bus driver, I'd kept my eye on the hurrying figure of the girl with THE SCHOLAR under her arm. So when I gained the sidewalk at last, I started out at a rapid trot in the direction she'd gone.

Being considerably longer-legged than she was, I was right behind her when she approached the revolving doors to Perry's Department Store. Whether or not she realized I was following her I didn't know. As she waited for an empty slot in the revolving door, a middle-aged, red-haired woman came out. She caught sight of my quarry and said in a hearty tone, loud enough for me to hear quite plainly, "Why, hello, Gloria! You here for the dress sale too?"

Gloria mumbled something and was whisked into the store by the revolving door. I hesitated a moment, then stepped in front of the red-haired woman and said politely, "That girl you just spoke to—the one you called Gloria—I'm sure I know her from somewhere—"

The red-haired woman grinned at me. "I doubt it, buster," she said, "unless you get your hair styled at Heloise's Beauty Salon on the South Side. That's where Gloria works. She does my hair every Tuesday afternoon at three."

"Oh," I said. "What's her last name, do you know?"

"I've no idea." She sailed by me and breasted the waves of pedestrian traffic flowing past the store entrance. I went through the revolving door into Perry's and looked around anxiously. Gloria, the hairdresser, was nowhere in sight.

After a moment's survey of the five o'clock crowd jamming the store's aisles, I turned away. I was due to meet Susan for drinks and dinner at The Chanticleer in half an hour. And I figured Susan, whom I hoped to lure away from the checkout desk at the Public Library into marriage with me, was more important than a stolen copy of THE SCHOLAR. Especially since I now knew where to find Gloria and the stolen book.

Some of my pickups next morning were on the South Side, so it wasn't out of my way to stop at Heloise's Beauty Salon. I went in, and letting my eyes rove uneasily about the shop, feeling self-conscious, I asked at the reception counter if I could speak to Gloria.

"Gloria Dexter?" said the pretty black receptionist. "I'm afraid you can't. She's not here this morning."

"Her day off?"

"No. Yesterday was her day off."

"How come she's not here today?"

"We don't know. She just didn't show up. She usually calls in if she can't make it, but this morning she didn't."

"Did you try telephoning her?" I asked.

She nodded. "No answer."

"Well," I said, "maybe I can stop by her home. All I wanted to ask her about was a library book that's overdue. Where's she live?"

After I'd shown her my ID card, the receptionist told me Gloria Dexter's address. I thanked her and left.

The address wasn't fifteen minutes away. It turned out to be a single efficiency apartment perched on top of what used to be a small gatehouse to a private estate. The private estate was now two fourteen-story highrises set back from the street in shaded grounds. The only way up to Gloria's apartment was by a rusty outside stairway rather like a fire escape.

I was just starting up it when somebody behind me yelled, "Hey!"

I stopped and turned around. The hail had come from a burly man in dirty slacks and a T-shirt, who was clipping a hedge behind the gatehouse. "No use going up there, Mister," he informed me, strolling over to the foot of Gloria's staircase. "Miss Dexter isn't there."

I'd been expecting that. I said, "Do you know where she is?"

"At Memorial Hospital probably," he replied, "or the morgue. They took her off in an ambulance a couple of hours ago. I was the one who found her."

I hadn't been expecting that. "Did she have an accident or something?"

"She sure did. Fell all the way down that iron staircase you're standing on. Caved in her skull, it looked like to me."

I assimilated this news in silence. Then, "You found her at the bottom of this staircase?"

"Yep. Like a ragdoll."

"What time?"

"Eight thirty this morning when I came to work. I'm the yardman here. The ambulance boys said she'd been dead for quite a while, so she musta taken her tumble last night sometime."

Remembering the pretty receptionist at Heloise's Beauty Salon, I said, "I stopped at the beauty shop where she works before I came

here. They're worrying about her because she didn't show this morning. Maybe you ought to let them know."

"Never thought of that. Who'd you say you were, Mister?"

I showed him my ID card. "I wanted to see Miss Dexter about an overdue library book," I said. "Say, could I go up and get the book out of her place now? It'll save the library a lot of bother later on."

"Go ahead," the yardman said. "On second thought, I'll come with you, to see you don't take nothing but your library book." He grinned, exposing stained teeth. "Besides, you can't get in her place 'less I let you in. It's locked."

We climbed the rusty iron steps together. He unlocked the door at the top and we went into the Dexter apartment. It was as simple, pretty, and tasteful as Gloria herself. A daybed with a nubby red-and-gold coverlet stood against one wall, and over the bed there was a single hanging shelf filled with books.

I went straight to the bookshelf. "The book I want should be here somewhere," I said to the yardman. My eyes went down the row of spines. THE SCHOLAR wasn't there. Neither was any of the other 51 library books that had been stolen with my car.

"Take a look in her kitchenette and bathroom," the yardman advised me. "People read books in funny places."

A quick search failed to turn up THE SCHOLAR anywhere in the apartment.

The yardman was becoming impatient. "Tough luck," he said. "I guess you'll have to wait for the book and get it the hard way." He looked at the telephone on a dropleaf table near the kitchenette door. "I'll call her beauty shop from here," he said. "It'll be handier." He opened the telephone book, then hesitated. "What's the name of the place, anyhow?" he asked me. "Some fancy French name I can't remember."

"I'll look it up for you," I said. "Heloise's Beauty Salon is what it's called. With an H." I rifled through the telephone book and found the number for him. Another number on the same page was underlined in red. The yardman thanked me and I thanked him, and as I left, he was dialing the beauty shop.

My car was stifling when I climbed back into it. I rolled down the windows and sat for a couple of minutes, trying to figure out what to do next. Finally I drove downtown, left my car in the parking lot behind Perry's Department Store, and went inside.

At the Lost and Found counter I asked the girl, "Has a Public

Library book been turned in recently?"

She gave me a funny look and said, "Yes, the clean-up crew found one in a trash basket."

"Mine," I said with relief. "May I have it, please?"

"Can you describe it?" she said.

"Sure. The title is THE SCHOLAR. There are three cigarette burns inside the O on the cover. Like eyes and a nose." When she looked prim I added, "Somebody else put them there, not me."

She was suddenly businesslike. "That's the book, all right. But we don't have it here. You'll have to claim it at the Security Office." She dropped her eyes. "I turned it over to them a few minutes ago."

"What did you do that for?" I asked curiously.

"Ask Security," she said. "Mr. Helmut."

"I will. Mr. Helmut. Where can I find him?"

She pointed toward the balcony that ran along one side of Perry's street floor. "Up there. Behind the partitions."

I mounted to the balcony and pushed open an opaque glass door with the words *Security Office* stenciled on it. An unattractive girl with dull eyes behind horn-rimmed glasses was sitting at a desk inside the door, typing. She asked me what I wanted in a no-nonsense voice that didn't go with her bitten fingernails.

"You the Security Chief?" I asked, giving her my best smile.

"Don't be silly!" she answered sharply. "Mr. Helmut is our Security Chief."

"Then I'd like to see him for a minute, please."

"He's out in the store making his morning round. Maybe I can help you?"

"Your Lost and Found desk sent me up here to ask about a book from the Public Library that was found in the store last night."

She gave me a blank look. "I'm sorry. I don't know anything about any library book. Mr. Helmut ought to be back soon if you'd care to wait." She waved at one of those form-fitting chairs for which I understand the Swedes are responsible. I sat down in it.

Ten minutes later a burly black-browed man with long sideburns pushed open the Security door and came in. He paused abruptly when he saw me. He had my stolen copy of THE SCHOLAR in his hand.

"Mr. Helmut," his secretary fluted, "this gentleman is waiting to see you about a library book."

He shot me a sharp glance out of quick intelligent brown eyes and said, "Okay. Come on in." He held the door to his private office open and I preceded him inside. He motioned me to a straight chair and

sat down behind a desk bearing a small metal sign that read C. B. HELMUT. He put my library book on the desk top and raised his black eyebrows at me. "A library book?" he inquired. "This one?" He pointed at THE SCHOLAR.

I nodded. "That's the one. It was stolen from me some time ago, Mr. Helmut. The reason I'm here is that yesterday, on a bus, I saw a girl carrying it under her arm. I recognized it by those burns on the cover. When I tried to ask the girl about it, she ducked into your store—maybe to brush me off in the crowd of shoppers, or maybe to get rid of the stolen book before anybody caught her with it."

"The clean-up crew found it in a trash basket here last night," Helmut said.

"So your Lost and Found girl told me. She also told me the book was turned over to her first. Then she turned it over to you. Mind telling me why?"

"Routine security measure, that's all." Helmut ran a thick finger over the cigarette burns on the cover of THE SCHOLAR. He was enjoying himself, acting the important executive.

"Security measure?" I said. "How does store security come into it?"

Idly he opened the cover of THE SCHOLAR and leafed through the first 20 pages or so in a leisurely manner, wetting his fingertip to turn the pages. Then suddenly he said, "Look here, Mr. Johnson," and held out the opened book for my inspection.

THE SCHOLAR was a 400-page book, more than two inches thick. The copy Helmut held out to me was only a dummy book. The insides had been cut out to within half an inch of each edge, so that the book was now, in effect, an empty box, its covers and the few pages left intact at front and back concealing a cavity about seven inches long, four wide, and an inch and a half deep.

I said, "So that's it."

"That's it," Helmut echoed me. "A shoplifting gimmick. You see how it works? Shoplifter comes into the store, puts down her library book on the counter while she examines merchandise, and when our salesclerk isn't looking, the shoplifter merely opens the book and pops in a wrist watch or a diamond pin or a couple of lipsticks or whatever and walks out with them, cool as you please."

Helmut shook his head in reluctant admiration. "Can you imagine a more innocent-looking hiding place for stolen goods than a Public Library book? Why, it even lends class to the shoplifter, gives her literary respectability."

"Shoplifting!" was all I could think of to say.

"Pilferage ran almost a million bucks in this store last year," Helmut went on. "Most of it shoplifting. So we're pretty well onto the usual dodges—shopping bags with false bottoms, loose coats with big inside pockets, girls leaving fitting rooms with three or four sweaters under the one they wore going in, and so on. But this library-book trick is a new one on me. And it's a beaut!"

It was a beaut all right. I said, "You better watch out for more of the same, Mr. Helmut. Because that girl stole fifty-one other library books when she stole this one. Out of my car."

"Ouch!" he said. Then, "You're from the Public Library?"

I nodded and showed him my card.

"Well," said Helmut, "since you scared her yesterday, let's hope she'll think twice about using the library-book method again."

"Let's hope so. Can I have the book now?"

"Sure," he said. He handed me the book.

"I wish I hadn't lost the girl last evening," I said. "I might have got my other books back too."

"Wouldn't do you much good if she's gutted them all like that one," Helmut said as I went out.

At two o'clock I was sitting across his scarred desk from Lieutenant Randall, my old boss. I'd just related to him in detail my adventures in recovering THE SCHOLAR, now considerably the worse for wear.

The book lay on his desk between us.

Randall put his cat-yellow eyes on me and said, "I'm very happy for you, Hal, that you managed to recover a stolen book for your little old library. Naturally. But why tell me about it? Petty book theft just doesn't interest me." He was bland.

I gave him a grin and said, "How about first-degree murder, Lieutenant? Could you work up any interest in that?"

He sat forward in his chair. It creaked under his weight. "You mean the Dexter woman?"

I nodded. "I think she was killed because I spotted her with my stolen book."

"She fell downstairs and fractured her skull. You just said so."

"She fell downstairs, all right. But I think she was pushed. After somebody had caved in her skull in her apartment."

"Nuts," Randall said. "You're dreaming."

"Call the coroner," I suggested. "If the dent in her head was made

by hitting one of those rusty iron steps, there could be some rust flakes in the wound. But I'll bet there aren't any."

"Jake hasn't looked at her yet. She only came in this morning. I've seen the preliminary report—fatal accident, no suspicion of foul play."

"Ask him to take a look at her now, then."

"Not until you give me something more to go on than rust flakes." He laced his voice with acid. "You're a showoff, Hal. So you probably think you know who killed her, right? *If* she was killed."

"Mr. C. B. Helmut," I said. "The Security Chief at Perry's Department Store. That's who killed her."

Randall's unblinking yellow stare didn't shift. "What makes you think it was Helmut?"

"Three pieces of what I consider solid evidence."

"Such as?"

"Number One: when I looked up the phone number of Heloise's Beauty Salon for the yardman in Gloria Dexter's phone book, there was another number on the same page underlined in red ink."

Randall frowned. "Helmut's?"

"C. B. Helmut."

"If she was a shoplifter," Randall said, "why the hell did she want to know the phone number of Perry's Security Chief?"

"Especially," I said, "since the underlined phone number was Helmut's *home* number, not the extension for Security at Perry's Department Store."

Randall's knuckles cracked as he curled his hands into fists. "What's evidence Number Two?" he asked in a neutral tone.

"Helmut called me by name, although I was a perfect stranger to him and he to me."

Randall said, "Why not? You showed him your ID card."

"He called me Mr. Johnson before he saw my ID card."

"The Lost and Found girl or his secretary told him who you were."

"I didn't tell either one of them my name."

"Well." Randall stared past my shoulder in deep thought. "He knew who you were and what your job was before you told him, then?"

"Yes. And there can be only one explanation for that."

"Don't tell me. Let me guess. You think he stole your car and your books."

"Right. I'm sure he recognized me the minute he saw me today."

"I don't see what the hell that has to do with Dexter's murder."

"Dexter was in cahoots with Helmut," I said. "She told him I followed her and chased her into the store."

"Wait a minute," Randall said. "You've lost me."

I laid it out for him. "The girl was scared when I braced her about the library book. She ducks into Perry's to lose me, but has the bad luck to meet one of her hairdressing customers at the entrance. From inside the door she looks back and sees that I have stopped her customer and am obviously asking about her, about Dexter. So she panics. She steps into one of the store telephone booths, gets Helmut on the phone, tells him a Hal Johnson from the Public Library is hot on her trail and by now probably knows who she is on account of the hairdressing customer. What should she do?

"Helmut tells her not to come near the Security Office, just throw the library book into a trash basket and go on home. And deny she ever had the book if anybody asks her again about it. Helmut hopes the book will be burned in the store incinerator with the other trash, of course. But the book is turned in to the Lost and Found desk this morning, so Helmut's stuck with it. And I show up before he can dispose of it."

"You should have been a detective," Randall said, deadpan. "I still don't see how that gets Dexter murdered."

"Helmut knows I'll get to Dexter sooner or later, now that I know who she is. He knows I'll apply pressure about the stolen book and eventually go to the police. So he figures she'll blow the whole sweet setup he's got going for him, unless he takes her out of the picture completely."

"What setup?"

"Don't you get it? The guy's a modern Fagan," I said. "He's got a bunch of girls like Dexter shoplifting for him all over town! Using scooped-out library books—the books he stole from me—as containers. And reporting to him by telephone at home."

Randall took that without blinking. "Well, well," he murmured. He contemplated his folded hands on the desk top. "You said something about a third piece of evidence?"

I gave him a sheepish look. "I hesitate to tell you about that one. It's slightly illegal."

"So is your friend Helmut, you think. So tell me."

"I talked my way past Helmut's super and got into his apartment at Highland Towers—"

Randall blinked at last.

"And—?" he said.

"I found twenty-seven of my stolen library books at the back of his clothes closet."

"Scooped out?"

I shook my head. "No, perfectly normal."

"So." Lieutenant Randall leaned back and put his hands behind his head, his elbows spread. "Twenty-seven, you said? You think he's got people using the other twenty-four books in shoplifting for him?"

I nodded.

"That he's recruited a gang of otherwise respectable people like Dexter to turn shoplifter for him?"

I nodded again.

Randall ruminated aloud. "He's store Security Chief. In the course of his job he runs into a lot of people who are *already* shoplifters, is that what you mean? So he blackmails some of them into working for him by threatening them with the police?"

"It could be, couldn't it?"

Randall looked at me with the air of a man who suspects his son of cheating on a geography exam. "Hal," he said, "you recently remarked, and I quote: 'The guy's a modern Fagan. He's got a bunch of girls shoplifting' et cetera." He tapped his desk top with a finger like a sausage. "How do you know they're all *girls*? You holding out something else?"

"I found a list of girls' names in one of the stolen library books in Helmut's place. Here's a copy." I tossed an old envelope on his desk.

He made no move to touch it. "That isn't evidence, Hal. It could be a list of his daughter's friends. Members of his wife's bridge club. Anything."

I said, "I *know* one of the girls on that list, Lieutenant. Ramona Gomez—she works in the library cafeteria. Couldn't you go and ask her in a friendly way if she's been blackmailed into shoplifting for Helmut? With what you know now, it shouldn't be hard to make her talk."

Randall stood up. "Yeah," he grunted, "I guess I could do that much, Hal. And a couple of other things too. Leave the book, will you?"

"Let me know how you make out," I said, "because the books in Helmut's closet still belong to the library, you know."

I was at home having a lonely shot of Scotch after my delicious

TV dinner when Lieutenant Randall phoned. Seven hours. He was a fast worker. "How's the stolen library-book business?" he asked by way of greeting.

"Booming," I replied. "And how's it with the brave boys of Homicide?"

"Also," he said. "We've got your pal Helmut."

"For Murder One?"

"What else? That print we turned up under the dash of your stolen car, remember? It's Helmut's."

"Good," I said. "Does it match anything else?"

"Strange you should ask," said Randall. "It matches a thumbprint on the metal buckle of Dexter's dress. I guess Helmut dragged her to the iron stairway by the belt after he conked her."

"No rust flakes in her head wound?"

"None."

"What'd he conk her with?"

"Swedish ashtray. Glass. Hers. Weighs about two pounds. A perfect blunt instrument. His prints are on that too."

"Careless, wasn't he?"

"You might say so. He failed to reckon with the brilliance of the police is how I'd put it."

"You talked to Ramona Gomez?"

"Yep. We couldn't turn her off when we hinted that Helmut had knocked off Dexter. She spilled everything. Helmut caught her shoplifting at Perry's and blackmailed her into working for him, just as you figured. Same with the other girls."

"Poor Ramona," I said. "You're not going to take any action against her, are you?"

"Immunity," said Randall wryly, "in exchange for her memoirs about Helmut. Same with all the girls on the list."

I sipped my whiskey and asked, "Did Ramona say anything about fingering me to Helmut?"

"Yeah. She admitted telling Helmut he could get a whole load of books from the Public Library without any chance of their being traced if he just swiped your car when you had the trunk filled with overdues." Randall chuckled. "Your Ramona pointed you out to Helmut as a prime source for library books when he got his big idea about using them for shoplifting."

"That wasn't nice of Ramona," I said. "Maybe you better charge her with conspiracy or something, after all."

"We only picked up Helmut half an hour ago," Randall said. "He

was taking a briefcase full of stolen goodies to the fence he's been using. We trailed him to the fence before we jumped him, and got the fence too. Isn't that clever?"

"Brilliant," I said. "Who's the fence? Anybody I know?"

"None of your business. You're a book detective, remember? Fences are for adult cops, my boy."

"As a book detective, then, I'm interested in whether any more of the library's books will turn up as shoplifters' tools," I said. "Bad for the library's image—you can understand that, Lieutenant."

"Don't fret yourself, Hal. Helmut called all his girls last night after killing Dexter and instructed them to discontinue using library books in their work. At least, that's what all the girls have told us."

"That means the library's lost twenty-five books, Lieutenant. Who wants to read a scooped-out novel, even for free? But you got the other twenty-seven for me, didn't you, out of Helmut's closet?"

"Evidence," said Randall. "You'll get them back after Helmut's trial."

"What!" I yelled. "That'll be months, maybe years!"

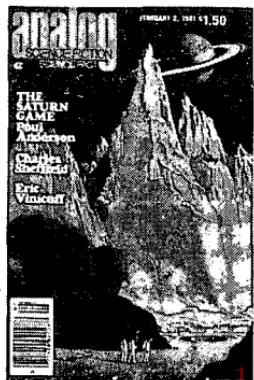
Randall sounded hurt. "You've got nobody but yourself to thank for that," he said. "If you're going to solve my murders, you can't blame me for collecting your library books."

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Berkely Mather

Treasure Trove

The saga of Jimmy Turrell beginning immediately after Dunkirk and culminating in a £500,000 treasure hunt—"probably worth much more now, with prices soaring the way they've been" . . .

All Jimmy Turrell possessed when he landed at Dover was a pair of pants, a flannel shirt, and a firm resolve to go no more a-soldiering. His sartorial deficiencies were made up for at the temporary quartermaster's store on the dockside where some nice ladies at the W.V.S. canteen gave him tea, soup, cigarettes, and kind words, and a harassed R. T. O.'s staff shoved a railway ticket, a ten-shilling note, and a buff form at him with a request to keep moving as there were a thousand blokes in similar plight in front of him and Gawd knew how many behind.

The buff was in place of his A.B. 64, the sole identity document a British soldier carries on active service, which was now a pulpy mass somewhere in the English Channel, and it was made out to Private B. Kemp, No. 51832986, of the Royal Army Service Corps. Kemp was the name of Jimmy's platoon leader—the R.A.S.C. was a very large body of men indeed—and the number he filled in was the first unthinking routine that came into his head.

All in all, Jimmy Turrell—now B. Kemp—considered he had enough on him now to blind any bloody military policeman who was ever pupped, and in those frenetic days immediately after Dunkirk his confidence was no doubt fully justified.

He made his way to the home of his married sister in the East End, but his brother-in-law said not flaming likely; he was on the lam from the Grenadiers himself, and anyhow young Jimmy had a record—only two appearances in the Juvenile Court, admittedly, but that meant he was on the books and, family loyalty notwithstanding, he'd rather he kept going. He did fix him up with civilian clothes, however, and a few words of advice, while his sister wept on his shoulder and slipped her weekly pay envelope from the aircraft factory into his side pocket.

The contents of the envelope got him a room in a large house in a rundown square between Paddington Station and Bayswater, and the advice took him to Soho where he sat for some six hours each day in a corner of Nicky Laurantus' pie and beanery until he was contacted by Jellyboy-Simpson's talent scout, as his brother-in-law had forecast and no doubt arranged. What with conscription and youngsters precociously branching out on their own in the black market, likely lads to devil for the barons in really big jobs were getting a bit thin on the ground in those days.

And Jellyboy *was* a baron—the biggest and best safecracker of the lot—and what he was laying on at this moment was very big potatoes indeed. Half a million pounds worth of hot diamonds had come out of one end of Antwerp just as the Germans entered the other, and they were now in the strong room of a certain Hatton Garden dealer.

It was a beautifully cased job. A fixer rented a shop three doors along from the diamond merchant's place and Jellyboy moved in with four of his blokes—two bricklayers, a plumber, and an electrician—and they tunneled for nearly six weeks before coming up through two feet of concrete into the basement strongroom where the safe was.

Jimmy was the lookout, fronting by day as an office boy busily going from one building to another with a bunch of letters and papers in his hand, and at night as a firewatcher up on the roof. They had a bellpush hidden in the entrance of an office building and it was his job to press it if the dull thudding down under the foundations ever got too audible. Also, from time to time, he used to lower bottles of water, food, cigarettes, and other necessaries through a ventilation shaft.

There was nothing difficult about any of this in the blackout. He just had to keep his wits about him, his eyes open, and his mouth well buttoned.

And he did all that in a manner that earned Jellyboy's warmest praise—right up to the night when after twenty-four hours of superhuman toil they made their final breakthrough into the safe itself. It was inconsiderate of Herr Goering to open the Blitz on London on that same September night.

They dug Jellyboy and his four teammates out from under the rubble the next day, in a routine salvage operation—more or less unhurt. Two of them managed to scarper in the confusion, but Jellyboy himself and the ~~remaining two weren't~~ quick enough; and

they were done bang to rights with a blown safe and a thousand pounds' worth of highly illegal equipment in the strongroom.

But not the diamonds. They had come up the ventilator in a canvas bag at the end of a rope when Jellyboy realized that they were trapped. They came up with his almost tearful exhortations to Jimmy to remember that he was a good boy—and to act like one—that God's eye would be on him the whole time until he, Jellyboy, was in a position to take over again, at which juncture if he, Jimmy, had got any wicked ideas about this bag of ice, he, Jellyboy, would personally slit his flickering fuel pipe from navel to eyebrows, so help him.

Jimmy said, "What, *me*?" in an injured tone. "Caw! What do you think I am?" And he took off through the smoking ruins to the comparative safety of the West End. Jellyboy subsequently was sentenced to seven years, while the other two, with not quite such impressive records, drew five and three respectively.

Jellyboy's instructions to Jimmy had been to hand the bag over to a lady named Sandra, who lived just off the King's Road, and these had been repeated, bloodthirstily, by the two quickthinkers who had made their escape, when they had cornered him in Nicky Laurantus' some days later. Jimmy managed to give them the slip, but it frightened him badly—so badly that he crept through the blackout to the house of his sister and brother-in-law, for more advice.

The advice was immediately forthcoming, together with a strong admonition from his brother-in-law. "You're too young for them sort of larks," he said sternly. "Every fence in the business is on the lookout for that stuff."

"Tell me the name of a good one," Jimmy begged, and his brother-in-law laughed scornfully.

"How far do you think you'd get?" he asked. "A green kid walking in with a bagful of ice that big? They'd have it off you and you'd be out on your ear in five seconds flat—and you'd still have Jellyboy, or some of his mates, to reckon with."

"What'll I do with it then?" Jimmy quavered.

"And it over to me," was the immediate response. "I'll see it's placed proper and you don't get robbed."

"I may be a kid but I'm not *that* green," Jimmy told him, and left quickly in a storm of outraged expletives.

But he was still frightened, the more so when he realized that the outer fringe of the underworld in which he now moved was talking

of the brash youngster by the name of Kemp who had come the acid over the great and terrible Jellyboy—and there was even mention of a sweepstake being run by a Dean Street bookie on how many days Jimmy could run before being fished out of the Thames one foggy morning.

So he stayed close to his room for the next few days, but he was behind with the rent now and the meager expense money he had got from Jellyboy was coming to an end. He even toyed with the idea of taking the bag to Sandra, but he put that firmly behind him as pusillanimous, and finally bought a trowel and a paperhanger's knife from a Do-It-Yourself shop and pinched a little cement from some bomb-damage works across the square.

Then he carefully prised away the stained wallpaper in an alcove by the fireplace in his room, removed five bricks, stowed the bag in the cavity behind them, and made a very neat reparation job of it afterward.

That took care of the half million pounds worth of diamonds. Nobody knew his hideout; some feral instinct had made him keep that dark even from his sister, let alone from his Soho acquaintances.

He hitchhiked to Sheffield then and was soon doing quite nicely retailing near-nylon stockings round the pubs for a black market wholesaler; but his luck ran out one night when he tried to flog a pair to a large and solemn man in a stained raincoat who heard his spiel right through and then said, "Where did you get 'em? Where's your hawker's license? Comes to that, where's your ration book and identity card? What's a young bloke like you doing out of uniform? And I think you'd better take a little walk along with me"—all in one long flat Midland monotone.

He tried the lost memory-and-shellshock act at his court-martial and was lucky in that a fairly easy Command Psychiatrist shrugged and said, "Could be. Lot of it about," or words to that effect. So he got away with two years in the Glasshouse, which was reviewed after six months, as was the custom then, and he was reposted to another infantry unit, landing some months later in Bombay where he managed to keep his nose clean and turn a dishonest rupee or two in the Transit Camp for the duration.

He was demobbed in 1946 and returned to London. The first place he made for was the square north of Bayswater, and there he got a nasty shock. They'd had a doodlebug on it, and half the terrace where he'd sojourned was a powdered heap of rubble.

But then, with heartstopping relief, he saw that the damage had

missed Number 12 by three houses, although none of them had come through it scathless. Imitation stone cornices had been ripped off and many of the windows were blanked out with corrugated iron.

He went up the steps. Children were playing about and there were five perambulators in the hall. There were four variegated bellpushes on the warped door lintel, some with names illegibly scrawled on dirty bits of card beside them, and from that he assumed that the place had been subdivided into four flats. His room had been the second floor back, so he pressed the bell that he thought would correspond with that level. It had *Mulvaney* beside it. Nothing happened and a small girl informed him that none of the bells worked any'ow. So he went up.

The door to "his" room now appeared to be the entrance to the flat. He arranged his features into something between a courteous smile and an expression of authority not to be trifled with and tapped on the panel. After a few minutes a large man in a grubby undershirt opened up.

"Mr. Mulvaney?"

"And what if it is now?"

"Do you mind if I come in for a moment?" Round the hump of the big man's shoulder he could see the alcove quite plainly. A rickety chest of drawers stood in it now, but the ghastly rose-and-turnip^a patterned wallpaper seemed to be the same, although with a considerably deeper patina of grime.

"And what is it you'd be wanting in here?" the large man asked. "Are ye from the Welfare or young Sean's probation?"

Jimmy, who had been expecting to see a woman at this hour of the day, could come up with nothing better than that he had a nice line in nylons he would be bringing around—and two and a half turbulent minutes later he was picking himself up from the gutter in front of the house amid shrill applause from the children. A sympathetic postman brushed him down and led him away.

"Taking yer life in yer 'ands going into that dump, mate," he said. "Took over by the Council for homeless families, and a right bloody jungle it is. Not a one of 'em's paid a sausage rent in the last two years, because nobody's got the guts to go and collect it—and I don't blame 'em."

He went down to his married sister's torn by conflicting emotions—relief that the stuff was still pretty certain to be there, but wondering how the hell he was going to get at it. The boisterous welcome he received in the bosom of his family heartened him a

little. His sister immediately set about cooking Spam in powdered egg, while his brother-in-law slipped out to buy a couple of bottles of beer.

The two quickthinkers arrived while he was in the middle of his supper—with razors at the ready—and his brother-in-law, who had telephoned for them, locked his screaming sister in the closet under the stairs. Jimmy upended the supper table on them and departed through the kitchen window, taking the frame and glass with him, and didn't stop running until he had outstripped them by a good half mile.

He went to Birmingham this time, and stayed there for ten years, prospering greatly from the proceeds of various rackets that ranged from clothing coupons to used cars and culminating in the sweetest tickle of them all—scrap metal. He used to venture down to London on an average of once a month behind a large mustache, sunglasses, and the wheel of his current car, and at night he would go and gaze longingly at Number 12. It was still in Council occupation—with the same number of flats but far more denizens, among whom Mr. Mulvaney appeared conspicuously.

Yes, he prospered all right, but in all that time he never knew a single untroubled night's sleep. That bag behind the brickwork needled the silk pajamas off him and turned the smoked salmon, black market steaks, and champagne to dust and hydrochloric acid in his very mouth.

And then, at last, his break came. Number 12 and its four adjacent houses were derequisitioned and the tenants rehoused at the other end of Paddington—and great was the scramble when the rat-infested derelict houses were thrown on the open market. Every developer in the business seemed to be represented at the auction—including Jimmy, who retained a pretty downy man-of-affairs to bid for him, while he watched from the sidelines, having taken the precaution of adding a beard to the big mustache and dyeing the lot, together with his sandy hair, a midnight black.

It went as one lot—the five houses and the big hole at the end where the doodlebug had actually struck. Jimmy had been round in the early morning of the day of the sale in the hope that he might be able to slip in when Mr. Mulvaney and his brood moved out, but a horde of would-be squatters were waiting to pounce, and the police were there in force.

Ah, well, he thought philosophically, he was well armed. £61,000—everything he had in the world, his total assets. £30,000

ought to do it, his man-of-affairs had told him. A nice little parcel of land that—worth hanging onto for a couple or three years until this area really started to move up, then either put up a block of luxury flats himself, or get rid of it to one of the new combines when the property had appreciated another ten or twenty thousand.

Some fifty sharp-eyed gentlemen stood in front of the rostrum, and the bidding opened at ten thousand and went up in tantalizingly slow fives, signaled by winks, earpullings, and nose scratching with catalogues. Jimmy's man signaled by seemingly nervous twitches of his tie. It stuck for a while at twenty-five, and the hammer was just coming down for Jimmy when the only woman present, a shrievled little thing in a tatty near-mink, jiggled an earring, and away it went in a quick run to thirty-five—forty—forty-five—fifty—and by now Jimmy was sweating, and his mouth was dry.

His man-of-affairs looked up at him questioningly, and Jimmy nodded—so up it went to fifty-five thousand. Damn them, thought Jimmy. Does somebody know? Has somebody guessed? But he fought his doubts down—and up went the bidding to sixty. Everybody had dropped out now except the woman and a mousy little man at the back of the crowd, and eventually Jimmy got it at £65,000—four thousand over his limit—but he wasn't worrying about that. The bank would carry him for the difference—and he'd get a lot of it back in time if he hung onto it—and there was *half a million* hidden behind those bricks—probably worth much more now, with prices soaring the way they've been.

His man-of-affairs joined him and he was making out the check. He said, as he mopped his brow, "There's a lot of newspaper boys hanging around. They want to know who the principal is—and why."

"Get rid of them," Jimmy told him tersely. "If this leaks out I'm holding you responsible—personally. Thirty thousand! You ought to start doing some homework!"

The man-of-affairs moaned. "Those two were phonies. I was trying to tell you! They were put up by the Squatters' League just to monkey up the sale. They hadn't a feather between them. Thirty thousand pounds is the value—like I told you—unless you want to wait twenty years to make up the difference."

"If you can wait—and not be tired by waiting," quoted Jimmy, who knew his Rudyard Kipling.

His receipt took him past the police without question, and the icepick and trowel he carried in his overcoat pocket made short shrift of the brickwork.

But there was no bag there—and he was gibbering and weeping when the solemn young constable on duty at the front door came up and found him.

"Blimey, sir," the constable said in mild surprise. "You're not diamond mining by any chance, are you?"

"What do you mean by that?" Jimmy demanded, glaring at him wild-eyed.

"Well, you're digging in the same spot as they found a bloody big bag of sparklers in 1945, when they demolished Number Twelve."

"This is Number Twelve!" screamed Jimmy.

"Was," the constable corrected him. "They renumbered the houses when the end of the square got blitzed. This is the old Number Ten. You wouldn't mind stepping along to the station with me, sir, would you? These houses has always interested Mr. Stanton, our Divisional Detective Inspector."

They weren't able to connect him with anything, but Jellyboy Simpson, long out of durance vile and now a lay preacher with the Primitive Methodists in Camberwell, started to get interested again—so once more Jimmy left town, the day after the Council slapped a compulsory purchase order on his property for £11,000. This he lost in disastrous betting ventures within three months.

But he's got a good steady job now, with a pension at the end of it if he keeps his nose clean for another fifteen and a half years.

He's a traffic warden in Wolverhampton.

"Q"

Jon L. Breen

The Flying Thief of Oz

In some versions of "My First Meeting with Sherlock Holmes" (also titled "Who Shall Ever Forget?") we commented on children's books: "As a boy my reading habits were pure and innocent. I confess now that I never read a Nick Carter until I was past voting age. My literary childhood consisted of Horatio Alger, Tom Swift, the Viking legends, the multicolored Lang fairy books, Frank Merriwell, Baseball Joe, the Rover Boys, Tarzan, The Three Musketeers, Jules Verne, Peck's Bad Boy, and—yes, the Oz stories. I can reread the Oz books today—and I often do."

Yes, the Oz stories. In some ways they provided the greatest stimulation to my boyhood imagination. It is impossible for me now—more than sixty years after I first visited the Land of Oz in print—to calculate how much influence the original Oz books by L. Frank Baum had on EQ's creativity.

Yes, the Oz stories . . . for years I've wanted to publish a detective story set in the Emerald City, and for years I've suggested to Jon L. Breen such a pastiche possibility. Mr. Breen is without doubt our foremost pastichist-parodist, and at last he has gratified my wish. Here is a tale of crime and detection in Oz, with the Wonderful Wizard himself the sleuth, or rather, in the Ozian tradition of the Wizard's humbuggery, the apparent sleuth . . .

Take a journey with us—back into time—back to your childhood—back to the glory that was Glinda and the grandeur that was Baum—back to one of the pleasures of the lovely past. . . .

Detective: THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ

On the vast gray plains of Kansas, one day was much like the next, and the next was much like the one following. And although a little girl named Dorothy Gale was basically happy and

contented on her Uncle Henry's farm, she had seen enough other places and done enough exciting things so that her heart leaped at every chance for some new experience.

Thus, the day the flying machine landed in her uncle's field, she was thrilled at the prospect of a ride, though Uncle Henry and Auntie Em were far too concerned about the fate of their crops to appreciate the situation's possibilities.

The flyer, a thin male of medium height who proved quite handsome when he removed his goggles and muffler, was all apologies. "I am Clarence Mennen, at your service, sir, better known on the aviation circuit as the Magnificent Mennen. I want you to know that I sincerely regret any damage I may have done to your crops and will make it up to you, as soon as I have the money."

Uncle Henry snorted and scowled but Auntie Em proved more hospitable. "Accidents will happen, Mr. Mennen," she said. "You must join us for some dinner. You must be hungry."

"It was not completely an accident, madam," said the pilot later over a plain but appetizing meal in the farmhouse. "As I flew overhead, I could not help noticing that the large flat portion of your property makes an excellent natural airfield. I thought that with your permission I could offer rides to your neighbors for a nominal sum, and by giving you a percentage of what I make I could pay you for the use of the field and for any damage I may have inadvertently caused."

"What?" Uncle Henry exclaimed. "Go up and down, up and down all day long in that terrible machine? You've done enough damage already."

"I usually land much better than that," said the pilot ruefully. "I have just returned from the Dominguez Field Air Meet in California, from which I made many flights and performed many daring stunts without a single accident."

"Neighbors are few and far between here," Uncle Henry said. "And those that are here are sensible folks. You'd have few takers."

"I would need to do some advertising in the nearby towns, of course, to attract potential customers."

"And you'll terrify my livestock."

"Not once they get used to it. The first experience is the terrifying one, and that is now past."

Uncle Henry looked troubled. He didn't really like the idea, but times were hard on the farm and a little extra money would be welcome. So reluctantly he agreed to the plan.

The Magnificent Mennen was looking at Dorothy, who regarded him with bright and eager eyes. He said, "Perhaps the young lady would like to take a short spin with me. Free of charge, of course."

"Oh, no," said Uncle Henry quickly. "I could not allow that!"

"Please, Uncle Henry," Dorothy pleaded. "I'm not afraid."

"I should be terrified," Auntie Em said. "I could not look."

"You wouldn't let the neighbor kids go up from here if you didn't think it was safe enough for me, would you?" Dorothy asked reasonably.

The Magnificent Mennen wasn't at all sure that this point would help his cause, but it seemed to win over Uncle Henry, who obviously found it difficult to deny his winsome niece anything she asked.

"Have you been flying long?" Uncle Henry asked.

"Over a year. It's a hard business to break into successfully. At the air show I spent days following around two brothers I thought could help me get established. However," he added with a sigh, "it turned out they weren't the right brothers."

"That's too bad. What would you need to get you on the right track?"

He laughed. "Money, of course. I have lots of good ideas, but I don't have the money to put them into practice. I sometimes think I'd do anything for it."

"I can see that," said Uncle Henry. To him, going aloft in a flying machine fell into the category of "doing anything."

Later as they walked from the farmhouse to the plane, Dorothy told the aviator, "I think it's a shame people have to worry so much about money. I have been to a place where there is no money and people share everything and live happily and peacefully with each other."

"Sounds great," said the pilot unbelievingly. "What's the name of this place and how do I get there?"

"It's called the Land of Oz, but I can't tell you how to get there. I got taken there once by a tornado, but there's none coming at the moment." When she mentioned the Emerald City with its great treasure houses of emeralds, diamonds, rubies, and other precious gems, the aviator's attention seemed especially keen.

The Magnificent Mennen moved an unusual-looking tank-shaped contrivance from the passenger seat as he helped Dorothy into the flying machine. "Oh, I forgot to tell you," he said. "I'm also the representative for the Middle West of the Dustgulper Vacuum Cleaner Company, and that's my sample. I may try to peddle a few

to some of my lady passengers, but please don't tell your Uncle Henry. It may be a touch too commercial for him."

"Oh, I don't think Uncle Henry will be put off by a little salesmanship of—what did you call it? A what cleaner?"

"Vacuum cleaner. Fellow patented them back in 1899 and they're just now starting to catch on. Most handy home device, but I'll give you my sales pitch later. Hang on. I'm going to fly high today, higher than ever before!"

As the flying machine took off, Dorothy could see little but dust. Soon, however, she looked down and saw the patchwork patterns of the fields and farms far below her. The pilot circled and as he did so went higher and higher, and higher, until he flew straight into a billowy white cloud. The little plane jerked and jumped in the air, and for the first time Dorothy was frightened. The pilot was shouting something, but with the noise of the engine, she couldn't understand what he was saying.

The plane came out of the cloud and now, far below, the ground was green and lush and beautiful. It looked nothing at all like Kansas.

The pilot shouted, "Where are we? Is this Oz?"

Dorothy nodded. Much as she loved Oz, Dorothy wished she had been able to tell Auntie Em and Uncle Henry she was going. They did worry so when she went off on one of her mysterious journeys, and they never believed the stories she told when she came back.

The pilot was circling the lush countryside looking for a place to land, but his search was less fruitful than it had been on the flat plains of Kansas. Finally he pointed to a stretch of yellow brick road. "I'll try to land there!"

"All right!" Dorothy shouted back, though she didn't see that her opinion carried much weight.

She watched the yellow bricks come closer and closer until the flying machine made a landing even rougher than it had made on her Uncle Henry's field. As it touched down with a jolt, Dorothy hit her head on a part of the plane and was momentarily stunned.

Moments later, as she began to regain consciousness, she heard voices, first faint as if far in the distance, then louder.

"What is it, Professor? What can this strange object be?"

"I can only surmise it is some sort of flying machine," said a second voice. Dorothy thought it sounded familiar. "I surely have never seen anything like it in Oz."

"Do they have such things in your country, sir?"

"I have heard that they do, but I have never seen one. Certainly they were not in common use when I left. Travel by balloon somehow seems safer."

Now Dorothy knew who it was. She lifted her head rather painfully and pulled herself up out of the seat. She found herself looking into the surprised face of the Wizard of Oz.

"Why, it's little Dorothy!" he cried delightedly. "Did you drive this strange machine here?"

"Why, no. It was Mr. Mennen—the Magnificent Mennen. Where has he gone? He took his vacuum cleaner."

"His what?"

"His vacuum cleaner."

"Then he must also have taken his vacuum. For whatever a vacuum is, we have nothing like it in Oz, and therefore to have need of a vacuum cleaner, he must also be carrying a vacuum."

"You are as silly as ever, oh, Oz the Great and Terrible," said Dorothy, "but I am very pleased to see you." She hugged him and planted a kiss on his bald and shiny head.

"The Scarecrow used to have a vacuum," the Wizard continued.

"Oh, did he?"

"Indeed. He carried it in his head until I granted him a brain. Well, well, we must find where your flying machine friend has gone. What was he called?"

"The Magnificent Mennen."

"Sounds like a brother humbug. We had better watch him."

For several days Dorothy was a guest in the amazing and beautiful Emerald City, where all the buildings were made of precious stones and everything and everybody was green. The Wizard of Oz (previously known as Oscar Zoroaster Phadrig Isaac Norman Henkle Emmanuel Ambrose Diggs of Omaha, Nebraska) still lived here and retained his title, but he no longer ruled. While Dorothy was renewing her friendship with the current sovereign, the Princess Ozma of Oz, and with Nick Chopper the Tin Woodman, the Cowardly Lion, and the Scarecrow, and all her other friends, the Wizard was using all his considerable skill, augmented by his even more considerable humbuggery, to find out what had become of the missing aviator, the Magnificent Mennen.

But no one among the Munchkins, Winkies, Quadlings, and Gilikins, the four different peoples who inhabit the Land of Oz, which was now politically united under Ozma's enlightened leadership, had seen the pilot.

The Wizard was frankly worried. Ever since Dorothy had told him of the aviator's interest in the great royal treasure rooms in the Emerald City, the Wizard had feared a possible robbery and had doubled the guard.

"Why do you worry so?" Princess Ozma asked. "There is no crime in Oz."

"You are forgetting that just last year we had a murder trial?"

"Yes," Ozma replied, "of Eureka the Kitten for eating my piglet."

"But Eureka was innocent," retorted Dorothy. "There was no murder and the piglet was quite safe."

"True, true," the Wizard agreed. "Nevertheless, my dear, your aviator is an outsider and does not understand the ways of Oz. And when I lived in the United States, I saw many evil deeds committed by inhabitants of that land which, by now, seems much stranger and more foreign to me than Oz. And in my days in carnivals and circuses, I surely learned never to trust anyone with a moniker like the Magnificent Mennen."

Finally a clue developed. H. M. Woggle-Bug, T.E., Dean of the Royal College of Athletic Science, reported that the librarian of the Temple of Learning, Ozbert Pentstone, had seen a stranger shortly after his arrival and had given him a pill. It must be explained here that all efforts by Ozians of college age were devoted to intercollegiate sports, and all academic subjects were taught by the ingestion of Knowledge Pills. Thus, librarians in Oz needed two degrees, one in library science and one in pharmacy.

"What was the subject of the pill?" the Wizard asked.

"The Complete and Total History and Geography of Oz."

"Then after taking it, he'll know everything there is to know about this land and everyone in it, making it all the easier for him to hatch some nefarious plot to steal the royal jewels. Why did the librarian give him the pill—didn't he realize that it could be dangerous?"

"I asked that and he gave me a long and stern lecture on intellectual freedom."

"I've always been suspicious of that fellow," said the Wizard.

The Wizard's worst fears were realized. That same afternoon the chief guard of the royal storehouses of Oz rushed to the Throne Room to report a terrible theft to Princess Ozma.

"Your Highness, hundreds and hundreds of precious gems have been stolen from the royal treasurehouse," the breathless guard cried.

"It is impossible," the Princess retorted, consternation clouding her lovely features. "Have not your guards been on duty all day and all night?"

"Yes, Your Highness, and I would trust every one of them with my life: I assure you no one entered or left by the big door."

"But is that not the only entrance to the main storeroom?"

"It is."

"Then I was correct and the theft *is* impossible." She turned to the Wizard. "Could we have another wicked Witch in our midst, Wizard?"

"I hope not," said the Wizard fervently, for his sideshow magic seemed feeble indeed compared with that of a genuine Witch. "I shall investigate."

"We must call in Glinda the Good," Princess Ozma reflected.

"Please, not yet, Your Highness. I am official Wizard here, and I beg to be allowed to complete my investigation before outside help is called in. Surely I must do something to earn the fruits of Your Highness's generosity in allowing me a suite in the palace."

"Very well, but if the mystery is not solved by nightfall, professional help will be needed."

"Professional, madam? Who is more professional than the Wonderful Wizard of Oz?"

Dorothy, who had been listening to their conversation with rapt attention, could not resist putting in, "Professional humbug."

The Wizard, not offended by this characterization, replied, "That may be all that is required."

Investigation revealed only one other possible means of entrance to the royal storeroom—a narrow air vent on the back wall of the room. It opened out into a cul-de-sac alleyway just around the corner from the busy Emerald City Central Market, which was crowded all day with shoppers purchasing green carrots, green potatoes, green oranges, and even green eggplants.

The Wizard looked around him. "A person could work here unobserved—no one ever comes into this alleyway. And I have alerted several of the merchants to watch the entrance to this cul-de-sac and note any suspicious-looking persons entering it."

"You seem to have thought of everything," Dorothy said.

"But not enough, apparently," said the Wizard ruefully. "Still, no one, not even the tiniest of Munchkins, could get into the storeroom through this air vent. I can just barely get my arm through it, but not far enough to reach any of the bins containing the jewels. Dor-

othy, I am totally baffled as to how this crime was committed."

He sighed. "We simply are not used to this sort of thing in Oz. No one here would want to steal the precious gems, because they are of no practical use to anyone here. But if your pilot friend—"

"I don't think I shall call him my friend if he proves to be a thief," Dorothy said worriedly.

"If the Magnificent Mennen can get even a handful of emeralds and rubies back to our world, Dorothy, his fortune will be made. Well, to work! Our next step will be to find out from my merchant-spies who entered this cul-de-sac this afternoon and then to interview all the suspects in the Throne Room. If nothing comes of that, I can only think there has been some collaboration by one of the main door's guards. I would hate to believe that!"

Dorothy thought the Wizard had never looked sadder than at the moment he confronted his three suspects in the Throne Room, with the Princess Ozma presiding. For the only three persons who had entered the cul-de-sac were three of the most respected citizens of Oz, and ordinarily no one would be more above suspicion.

"Of course, I had nothing to do with it," said Nick Chopper the Tin Woodman. "And it breaks my heart to think you would suspect me."

"What was that large and mysterious-looking bag that the merchants saw you wheeling in front of you into the cul-de-sac?" the Wizard asked.

"It was my golf bag," the Tin Woodman responded.

"Golf bag?" said Dorothy. "I didn't know people play golf in Oz."

"We play everything you can think of in Oz. Why not golf? Of course, the Emerald City Links is an especially nice place to play—since everything is green, even the sand traps, no matter how bad your shot is, you always get it on the green."

"That golf bag would be a good place to conceal stolen gems," said the Wizard.

The Tin Woodman nonchalantly applied the oil can to his left elbow. "Nonsense. I do think I'll give up golf, though. I develop a bad hitch in my backswing if I don't oil myself after every hole."

"And with the price of oil what it is—" laughed the Scarecrow.

The Wizard's usually merry face, trying to look severe, turned to his second suspect. "You don't seem to be taking this too seriously, Scarecrow."

The Scarecrow looked at the Wizard through identical round eyes

painted on his burlap head. "Well, I didn't do it, and I know my friends didn't either. It would be silly for us to steal all those jewels. You don't suspect me, do you, Dorothy?"

"I don't see how I can," the little girl said with a puzzled frown. "But still, only the three of you went into the cul-de-sac."

"So what! So what!" the Cowardly Lion retorted belligerently. "So what if we did! None of us could reach in and get anything out through that tiny little air vent!"

"That's true," said the Wizard. "But I think I might know a way . . . You also had a golf bag with you today, didn't you?"

"What of it? I was going to play golf with the Tin Woodman and the Scarecrow. What of it? I'm giving up golf anyway."

"Why?"

"It frightens me."

"Why?"

"It's so dangerous. I don't like dangerous sports."

"Hm. I understand why all three of you were wheeling golf bags. But what were you doing in the cul-de-sac?"

"We agreed to meet there and then go to the golf course," said the Tin Woodman.

"But you were all there at different times," said the Wizard.

"We were to meet at two o'clock," said the Tin Woodman.

"No, no, we were to meet at two thirty," said the Scarecrow.

"No, you're wrong, it was at three o'clock we were supposed to meet," said the Cowardly Lion.

"Well, now I understand one thing," said the Scarecrow.

"What's that?"

"Why we're standing here and not playing golf. If you fellows had got the meeting time right, we would have met in the cul-de-sac, gone on to play golf, and no one would be accusing us of robbery!"

"But the correct time was two o'clock," said the Tin Woodman.

"It was three o'clock," said the Cowardly Lion. "Aw, whose idea was it to play golf anyway?"

"It was the Scarecrow's," said the Tin Woodman.

"No, it was the Cowardly Lion's," said the Scarecrow.

"Mine? Mine? I would never suggest such a thing. It must have been Nick Chopper's idea."

"This," announced the Wizard of Oz, "is getting us nowhere. And slowly at that."

Dorothy tugged at the Wizard's sleeve and whispered something in his ear. His eyes lit up and he regarded his three suspects with

new suspicion. "Of course, I ought to have known!" he exclaimed. "I now know who, and I *think* I know how."

"Who is the thief?" asked the Tin Woodman in a shaking voice. "Is it one of us?"

"I have been sure as I could be from the start that the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Cowardly Lion are all above suspicion. But there is one further possibility—that one of the three of you is an impostor, the Magnificent Mennen in disguise, waiting for a chance to escape. And thanks to Dorothy I know which one it is."

The three suspects looked at one another.

"We must all stay together until the guilty one is revealed," said the Cowardly Lion.

"Yes," said the Scarecrow, "so that the guilty one has no chance to escape."

"But, Wizard," said Dorothy, "I still do not understand how the jewels were stolen from the royal storeroom."

The Wizard had been distractedly looking toward the door of the Throne Room, as if for an actor who was late for his cue.

Suddenly into the room burst one of the palace guards.

"We found it, Wizard," the guard cried. He was carrying a machine that Dorothy recognized as the Magnificent Mennen's sample Dust-gulper Vacuum Cleaner. The Wizard leaped upon it, opened it up, and removed its bag. He shook it and shook it, but nothing fell out except some oddly colored pieces of wood. Soon a pile of these lay on the floor of the Throne Room, but there was nothing else inside the vacuum bag.

"I am disappointed," the Wizard said. "The Magnificent Mennen must have had an opportunity to remove the gems and hide them elsewhere. Still, I believe this little machine is the answer to our locked-storeroom mystery. You will observe it is of a size easily concealed in one of our friends' golf bags. I shall proceed to demonstrate how the crime was accomplished."

He beckoned Dorothy, the Princess Ozma, and the three suspects to follow him.

At first the Scarecrow hung back.

"I don't want to come," he said. "That machine frightens me. I'm afraid it would eat up my straw."

"It's not like you to be frightened," said Dorothy.

"No, but it's like me, and I prefer to stay heré with the Scarecrow," the Cowardly Lion said, his mane quivering.

"No, you don't," said the Tin Woodman. "We said we'd all stick

together until we knew which of us is the impostor, and besides, I want to see how this works."

"Since there is no electricity in Oz, we shall need your enchanted extension cord, Your Highness," said the Wizard.

Princess Ozma sent a servant girl to the place where the enchanted extension was kept, but the maid returned to say it was missing:

"Could this be it?" the guard asked. "I found it with the mysterious device."

"Excellent! Excellent!" cried the Wizard. "Now I know I am right. Follow me."

The group followed him to the air vent outside the royal storehouse. He put the end of the long tube attached to the cleaner into the opening, plugged the electric cord on the vacuum into the enchanted extension cord, and switched on the machine. It made a loud whirring noise that caused great quivering and fear on the part of the Scarecrow and the Cowardly Lion, but the Tin Woodman merely watched with interest, knowing the machine held no threat.

The Wizard listened intently, but seemed not to hear some additional noise he had expected. Then he switched the machine off, removed the inner bag again, and found only more dust.

"It didn't work!" he said. "Blame me, it didn't work! I thought the thief simply vacuumed up some of the gems, but there are plenty left in there and this thing didn't pick up a single one."

He turned the machine on again and applied the sucking device to his hand. Nodding his head slowly, he shut it off again. "Not strong enough. The gems would be too far away and too heavy for the machine to collect. It could pick up things like dust and those little thin pieces of wood we found, but not anything as heavy as the huge diamonds and rubies and emeralds."

The Wizard of Oz shook his head sadly. "I must admit I am thoroughly befuddled."

None of the others could think of anything to say to comfort the Wizard, and for a time the little group stood in silence.

Suddenly a new gleam of light appeared in the Wonderful Wizard's eyes. "Befuddled," he repeated. Then he clicked his heels like a much younger man and repeated again, "Befuddled! Of course! Befuddled! How could I have failed to see it before? Come with me back to the Throne Room!"

Back in the Throne Room, the Wizard of Oz stopped two of Ozma's

servants who had just begun to sweep up the pile of thin wood chips "You see before you," the Wizard announced, "the Magnificent Men n'en's accomplice. Who is, of course, a Fuddle."

"A Fuddle!" exclaimed Princess Ozma, clapping her hands with understanding. Forgetting her regal bearing, she dropped to her knees and began to help the Wizard, who was fitting the pieces of wood together as if they were the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

"A Fuddle, of course," the three suspects said, nodding to one another knowingly.

Dorothy was unenlightened. "But what in the world is a Fuddle?"

"A citizen of Fuddlecumjig," the Wizard explained. "All the people in that unusual land are made up of these tiny pieces of wood, no two alike, and they fly apart whenever a stranger comes near. Then they must be put back together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, and indeed they pride themselves on the difficulty they present as puzzles. I believe this particular Fuddle passed the jewels out to the Magnificent Mennen, then flew apart, and was gathered up by the vacuum cleaner."

"That's remarkably clever," said the Scarecrow.

"That explains how the Fuddle got out," said the Tin Woodman who had creaked his way into a sitting position and was helping to join the pieces of wood. "But how in the world did he get in in the first place?"

"I have an idea about that too," said the Wizard, "but we're almost finished putting this fellow back together so maybe he can tell us."

"Yes, I can. Thank you," the Fuddle said. His upper body was now complete and he was watching with interest as the Princess Ozma and the Tin Woodman fitted the parts of his legs together. "I should never have become involved if I had suspected a real robbery. But when such a distinguished and honored citizen of Oz asked me to help him in a practical joke, well, how could I refuse?"

"You may justify yourself later," said Princess Ozma severely. "Explain how you got into the storeroom."

"Well, my cohort in crime—I shall not yet reveal his name to you though now I suspect he's an impostor—my cohort in crime devised a marvelous stratagem—"

"Fuddle!" the Princess exclaimed. "If you don't get to the point, you'll be exiled to Rigamarole Town, where all unplain speakers are exiled."

"Well, he put my right arm together first, you see, and pushed it inside the storeroom through the air vent. Then he placed my eyes

on the edge of the vent where they could see the inside of the store-room. With these tools I was able to quickly put myself together, pass him the gems, then fly apart and get vacuumed out. If I had ever suspected I would be shut up in that bag for so long, I'd have had nothing to do with it. I mean it's one thing to fly apart in the clean fresh air, but—"

"Yes, we understand," said the Wizard. "You were foolish to be taken in, but I have been foolish at times myself. Now, I think it is time you revealed the brain behind this ingenious scheme."

The Fuddle raised his arm and pointed straight at the Scarecrow. The pseudo-strawman made a half-hearted attempt to bolt, but he was quickly seized by the Tin Woodman and the Cowardly Lion. Dorothy reached up and pulled the burlap bag from his head, and the grinning countenance of the Scarecrow was replaced by the scowling face of the Magnificent Mennen.

"The brain," chuckled the Wizard of Oz. "That is ironic. The Scarecrow is the brain!"

"What have you done with the real Scarecrow?" Dorothy demanded.

"Left him hanging in a cornfield to scare crows, of course," said the defeated aviator. "He'll need someone to cut him down, but I didn't hurt him. I never intended to hurt anyone. Even my friend the Fuddle, I would have put him back together again before returning to the plane. If I hadn't been so anxious to come back and release him, I would have never been caught in your round-up of suspects, and I'd be back in the U.S.A. by now, my fortune made. The gems are hidden in a sand trap on the Emerald City Links. I assure you, I am not a criminal at heart. May I return to my plane and fly back home?"

"Of course," said Princess Ozma. "I don't think you would find the climate of Oz suitable to your particular temperament. Merely lead us first to the Scarecrow and then to the stolen gems and then you may return to your flying machine."

"I'm not sure I can find my way back to Kansas," the pilot admitted ruefully.

Ozma handed him a pair of bright green flying goggles. "These are the enchanted goggles, given to me by Glinda the Good. They will get you safely back to Kansas."

"And me too?" asked Dorothy. "Auntie Em and Uncle Henry will be so worried."

She saw in the faces of her friends the mixture of surprise and

sadness she always saw there when she made the inexplicable request to return to Kansas. But the Magnificent Mennen, completely repentant now, promised to bring her back safely.

"Tell me this, Mr. Mennen," said the Wizard of Oz. "You knew some time ago we had penetrated your disguise. Why did you continue to pretend until you were actually fingered by the Fuddle?"

"I didn't believe you really knew who I was. I thought it was all a bluff. My disguise was absolutely perfect. I could have fooled the Scarecrow's own mother, if scarecrows have mothers."

"Not quite perfect. The eyes on your scarecrow mask are exactly the same size. But as Dorothy whispered in my ear, and as I ought to have observed for myself, the real Scarecrow's left eye is larger than his right."

"We should have seen that too," the Tin Woodman told the Cowardly Lion reproachfully.

"If you knew, why didn't you expose me there and then?" the aviator demanded.

"Please, sir," said the Wonderful Wizard, "I should not have to explain a bit of showmanship to anyone who goes by such a cognomen as the Magnificent Mennen!"

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Jean Darling

Never To Be Lost Again

This was the 430th "first story" published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine... a story of irony and pathos interwoven with crime...

The author, Jean Darling (does the name sound familiar?), entered show business at the really tender age of six months. For five years she was the Leading Lady in the "Our Gang" Comedies (remember?). Later she played "Carrie" in the original Broadway production of "Carousel," and since has appeared in many stage, radio, and television shows. She married Kajar the Magician and has "wandered the world" in their own magic show, with their son Roy acting as stage manager.

Jean Darling added something else to her "dossier"—an interesting observation. "Singing and acting," she wrote, "one is trained to do, painting is copying what one sees, but writing is putting a dream to paper"...

Today is the first time the sun shone all this week. That's why I'm sitting here in the window seat. The view from this side of the house is still beautiful. It used to be nice from all the windows before Da sold the back garden. He sold it to property developers, as they are laughingly called, who took simply ages to build that great useless pile of brick and glass. They paid Da a good price for the property, but when it had been ours it had given us flowers and vegetables and birdsong each year. Now the brick monstrosity stands unrented, collecting dead leaves and broken windows.

Ron, the only son of the next-door neighbors, was a squatter before he came home this last time. Oh, not in the building out back, but somewhere right in the middle of town. The only reason he returned at all was because the house he shared with the rest of his commune was raided by the police and condemned as a health hazard. Da is very upset at having Ron living next door again and he'd do something about it if he could, but Da is helpless. Ron's father owns the

house next door, so the boy has a perfect right to stay there.

I'm glad Da can't chase him away, though. Ron always waves and smiles when he passes my window. And I don't really care if he was or is a mainliner; he's kind to me and I love him for it. I suppose you could sort of say it is a Romeo and Juliet romance—really! Guess what my name is? It's Julie—Julie Benson. My father, Da, is Terence Benson, an author and former Ambassador to various African countries.

Anyway, to get back to Ron. He is tall and slender, like a dancer. That's what I want to be, too. I want my legs wound with ribbons, my feet clasped in tiny pink-toed shoes, a tutu swirling around my flying limbs. Some day you'll see me on television floating featherlike across the screen just like the ballet dancer I saw last night. I won't mind the hard work or the practising. Ron and I can be together that way.

We'll get married and keep right on dancing until we become as famous a ballet team as Rudolf Nureyev and Margot Fonteyn. Our clamoring public will throng the stage door each time we give a performance, and like the Red Sea they'll part for us to pass, their hands reaching out just to touch the air we've moved through. A long elegant Rolls-Royce will whisk us home to our "squat" in the building that has usurped Da's back garden.

I suppose you doubt the truth of the things I have been telling you. You should. Sunshine after rain always makes me daydream. I'm not a dancer and Ron is not my boyfriend. Seriously though, I'm going to be a nurse. I became interested in nursing when Da was Ambassador to Mali. My ambition is to go where Dr. Schweitzer was—they need people there who are brave and strong like me.

Mother won't hear of it because I want to nurse in Black Africa. She's racist, as you can see. So, unless something drastic happens to make Mother change her mind, I suppose nursing as a career will have to be forgotten, even though Da has no objections. But what else can I do? I wouldn't like to be a secretary or a salesgirl in a boutique, and I must make up my mind. Time is growing short. I'll be 22 years old next month.

The sun has gone away, darkening the sky. Soon the clouds will shed large tears—tears almost as large as the ones locked inside my heart where even Da can't find them.

The rain will ruin Da's *Times* again because he won't carry an umbrella, ever. He says it makes him look like a comedy Englishman. He never wears a hat either, just uses the *Times* to protect

him from the rain. Mother hates him to get the paper wet, and says he looks like an old washerwoman with it clutched over his head. She doesn't really appreciate Da. Or me, for that matter.

But then, you see, she didn't really want me. Oh, there was nothing personal. Mother just didn't want children. She had neglected to tell Da of her aversion to childbearing prior to the wedding, but the dear man had been so smitten by her raven-haired beauty, I suppose he would have married her if she had confessed to being Dracula's daughter.

Theoretically I should have two siblings: I was the last of three pregnancies Da hoped through. The first two were terminated by Mother. Number one, a scant year after the marriage, she was the victim of a fall down the stairs. The second had been lost when Mother had ridden to hounds against Da's explicit wishes. When she miscarried for the second time, Da was heartbroken. More than anything he wanted a family. His brothers and sisters had 27 children between them. Mother had come from a long line of single children, and she had decided the line would stop with her.

Years later, when she found herself pregnant for the third time, Mother was off again, dancing, riding—she even took up trampolining. Nothing helped; I stayed the course. After I was born, Da gave up trying for a big family, deciding to quit while he was ahead, I suppose.

I am sure it will come as no surprise if I tell you that Mother and I are not friends. I wouldn't care two cents if she dropped dead tomorrow. All my love is for Da. He is my idol. When I think that maybe someday I'll be without him, my heart almost shatters with the pain. If anything happened to him, I think I'd die too, I love him so much.

There goes the front doorbell. You hear that ugly clumping? That's Mother tripping daintily in her new platform shoes. She looks simply ridiculous stumping along. She always has embarrassed my dear dignified Da with her way-out dress. From beatnik to hippie, she has been "with it" for years. If it were the Twenties, Mother would be dripping fringe and champagne-warped slippers all over pianos in the wee hours of the night; but I shouldn't be unkind. She wasn't always foolish, I've seen pictures of her before my birth and, I must admit, she was beautiful. But no longer, with her bleached piled-up hairdo and platforms worn to dazzle her latest protégé.

The new boy is sallow and acne'd and teaching her Ancient Greek. I wonder if she finds Greek very much different from the modern

French or modern Italian she studied in past lessons.

How brazen she is about these grotty little affairs! She flaunts them in my face, knowing I'd never tell Da, that I'd rather die than see him hurt. I try to make it up to him as best I can. He knows how much I love him. But it's difficult when one is grown up. A barrier seems to grow. No longer can I sit clasped tight in his arms, so tight that all feeling of lostness is cradled away. I'm too big for that now.

I remember once, long ago when I was quite small, he took me on a merry-go-round. Mother objected, making some malicious remarks that I recall to this day. I can still hear the cruelty of them and feel the terrible hurt. Da didn't say a word and finally she went away. We stayed on the merry-go-round and the horse went up and down, round and round. Lights flashed, cymbals crashed, music blared, and Da's arms held me so tight I could hardly breathe as he insisted over and over, "It's not your fault, little love. It's not your fault."

Soon after that Da put up the rear garden for sale. Those few months, while it was still ours, were the last happy times Da and I had together. I was on the brink of growing beyond lap size but he could still hold most of me snuggled in his arms. Every evening that long lovely summer he held me close and told me of the "Jumblies" and "The Duck and the Kangaroo." How I wished to be the Duck! To wear socks to keep my feet dry so the kangaroo would take me around the world on his tail, never to be lost or alone again.

If only I could have stayed little, never have grown up. The happy memories are all from those days so long ago when I was a child. Like the Sundays we spent at the beach before the terrible thing happened and we never went again. That last Sunday was just like all the others until Da said he'd go for ice cream. As soon as he was out of sight, Mother took me into the sea and swam swiftly out to the breakers. For a minute or so she held me, riding the waves. Then Mother disappeared.

After the momentary terror of being left alone had passed, I felt quite happy. Gentle waves led me down into a shimmering fairy tale where I'd find playmates—the Little Mermaid, the Water Babies, and other storybook friends. Yearnings would be fulfilled, everything would be as it should be. I was home at last.

Then strong arms snatched away the dream, and I was back to being me again. The sand felt warm and dry, and there was a pleasant hum of voices. Someone was rubbing my hands—Da, of course.

He was the first person I saw when I opened my eyes. For a moment I thought he was wearing a wreath, then I saw it was a wreath of faces, that haloed his head.

Curious bathers were murmuring concern and nodding encouragement on seeing that the half-drowned little girl was going to be all right. Everyone was glad, every one of them, except one—Mother. She returned my gaze with eyes so filled with hostility, with such naked hatred, that all at once I understood. I had defied her once more by unreasonably clinging to life.

There goes the bell again. I wish she'd answer the door. I get nervous listening to it ring while the person outside is getting cold and wet. It's only the doctor, of course, but he's human and should be let in. He comes every Tuesday and Friday at this time, regular as clockwork. Supposedly he's Da's friend, but that doesn't keep him from having a bit of fun with Spring.

Spring is Mother's name. Ridiculous, isn't it? Spring, at her age! I do wish she'd answer, but she won't until she's finished primping. Fluff, fluff, long red claws combing through her recently bleached hair. I don't have to see her to know every move she makes. The flap of the puff against her nose, the wipe of lipstick, the fingers tracing the fine webbing of wrinkles that creep like mildew, blurring the fineness of her cheek.

She wants to go to Switzerland to have her face lifted, but she can't because Da doesn't have the money. She wants a new mink coat, too, for all the good that will do her. Everything has gone on doctor bills. Just this morning, Da was on the phone to a real-estate agent. The man didn't seem too hopeful—nobody really wants a Georgian white elephant of a house as large and cold as ours is. So Mother will have to grow older and uglier, colder and poorer. There is no way now for her to avoid the misery that old age will bring to her.

Ah, at last that horrid ringing has stopped and the wet Dr. Madison has finally been admitted. And here they come, straight as arrows into this room. Oh, oh, look who's slinking in their wake. The little Greek protégé. This could be interesting.

I wonder if she has any idea how unwelcome she is, and the doctor, not to mention the Greek. Mother comes near and dabs in my direction with her handkerchief. Dr. Madison glances at me briefly before settling himself by the fire. The Greek boy sulks in the shadows.

An ear-shattering crash of thunder startles the handkerchief from

Mother's hand. The storm shades the room with false night. Mother moves toward the light switch, then changing her mind, she borrows the doctor's lighter. Soon the room springs to life again with the cheerful glow of candles. That's Mother for you, always the poseur.

But in her zeal she makes one unbelievable mistake. She lights the candle that stands on the taboret in front of my window. She's sitting over there beside the doctor, smoking and chattering like a schoolgirl. The Greek boy is watching them, but nobody is paying the least attention to me. Here, at last, is the chance that I have been waiting for all these years, since that Sunday on the beach.

With one bold stroke I will solve all Da's problems. He'll have money from insurance policies, and then maybe he'll marry some lovely young woman who will give him the family he's always wanted.

If only I can knock over the candle without being seen. Oh, please God, help me now to free Da. I hit the candle—it's rocking. Oh no! The wrong way! Get away from the curtains! Oh, God, what will I do, what will I—

But look! A breeze has fluttered the curtain across the tiny guttering flame, and the curtain has caught fire. Oh, see the hungry fire, the lovely hungry fire! Goodbye, Mother! Goodbye, Dr. Faithless Friend Madison! Goodbye, Foolish Greek Boy! Oh, Da, be happy!

Flames leaped up to welcome the falling roof. Water arched into the gutted shell of the once-beautiful house. Just a moment before, a man had stood black against the flames, and in one sudden thrust shoved a wheelchair out of the inferno to safety. Then he was gone, swallowed in a burst of flame that enveloped the old house.

A patrolman stood talking to a tired fireman lit by the nickelodeon flicker of the fire.

"How'd it start?" asked the cop.

"Crippled kid, Julie Benson, knocked over a candle," answered the fireman.

"Any casualties?"

"One. The crippled kid's father. He got home just in the nick of time to save the girl. Julie's mother was too hysterical to do anything but scream. Two men saved from the fire, too—a foreign kid and a man who says he's a doctor. They're in pretty bad shape." The fireman's voice was hoarse.

"Some kind of dame to run out and leave her kid even if she was

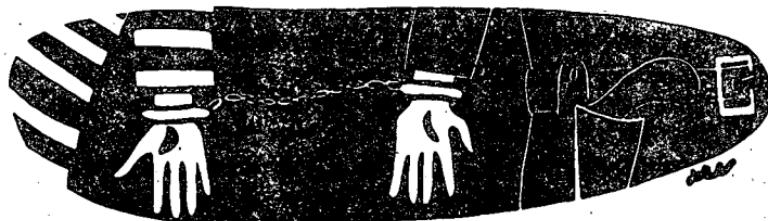
hysterical." The cop took off his hat and wiped the sweatband with a handkerchief.

"Yeah, some dame! But she sure has all the luck. She's just become a very wealthy widow. The house was insured for over a hundred thousand, and her husband carried a life policy twice that big so that the kid, Julie, would never have to worry. If it's a double indemnity, that woman certainly will be well-heeled. But I wonder what will happen to the girl . . ."

The fireman looked over at the blanketed figures being helped into the ambulance.

"She'll have the best care money can buy, I suppose. What luck! And all because that poor helpless kid accidentally knocked over a candle."

The cop put back his hat and started on his beat once more.



George Sumner Albee

The Talking Tree

The blackest man on Oturo, Constable McIntosh had been well trained by the C.I.D.; but what is such training compared with the help of a talking tree? . . .

Detective: CONSTABLE McINTOSH

Oturo, in the Windward Islands, is very small, very British, and very, very black. And the blackest skin on the island—mused Commissioner Fellowes, who was white but had long ceased to dwell on it—was owned by Constable Cosmos McIntosh, who comprised one-third of his police force. Cosmos McIntosh was a corporal. The other two policemen, Dyanand Ramdial and Jagdoo Koonhow, were privates.

"Stand easy," said the Commissioner.

Cosmos, in his white sun helmet with the long visors fore and aft, his starched white tunic, his blue trousers with the wide scarlet stripes down the seams, obeyed the command much as a steel I-beam would have. That is to say, he unbent by an amount so small as to be measurable only by micrometer. "Sah," he said, to demonstrate that he was comfortable.

"We have trouble," said the Commissioner. "Mrs. Sranihar Singh died yesterday, and Dr. McIlheny seems to think somebody helped her a bit."

"Och, most lamentable," commented Cosmos.

"You take the word out of my mouth," said the Commissioner wryly. "McIlheny keeps muttering about impossible circumstances. I think he's gone balmy. Get cracking on it, will you?"

Cosmos saluted, wheeled, and marched out to the courtyard. The police station, fresh and trim in its pale-blue limewash, cool under a scarlet roof of corrugated asbestos, perched on a slope above the harbor. This made it feasible to start a motorcycle engine by coasting down the narrow, twisting street—a fact that Cosmos deeply ap-

preciated, since the kick starter sometimes marred the high polish of his black shoes.

He mounted and rolled augustly down the slope, sounding his beeper for pigs, dogs, and people with equal courtesy, to the sign reading: "Dr. Fergus Figueroa McIlheny, M/D Also Other Degrees, Superlative Treatment of All Known Ails, Fees Consonant With Quality."

The physician, a thin, scholarly octoroon whose freckles matched his hair, behaved like a quack, prescribing lizard soup for the islanders' tizicks because they wanted it that way, but he was a competent surgeon and general practitioner just the same. He received Cosmos in his private morgue, a rear room in which Mrs. Singh was passing her first day of eternal rest under refrigeration.

"This one is a puzzler, Constable," he said. "When they called me, and I got up to the Singh house, the woman was dead. Her lips were cyanotic, and there were hemorrhages of the conjunctivæ, so I insisted on an autopsy."

"Quite right, I'm sure," said Cosmos.

"Yes. The lung tissue shows dilation of the capillaries and veins. There are petechial hemorrhages on the costal, pulmonary, and pericardial pleura, and the venæ cavæ are engorged," continued the doctor, relishing every mouthful. "But here's the puzzle. The woman died of suffocation, asphyxia—yet she *can't* have."

"Why not, sah?" asked Cosmos, notebook in hand.

"Because the room she chose to die in is air-conditioned, and the conditioner was going full blast. It had been on for hours, I'm positive, because the room was still cold even though they'd opened it ten or fifteen minutes before I arrived."

"Did somebody press a pillow over she nose and mouth, den?"

"No, she was alone, and she was locked in," said the physician testily. "That's what I was told, at any rate, and I have no reason to disbelieve it. But I can tell you this—Mrs. Singh didn't just lie down and die. I gave her a thorough physical examination only a few days ago, because she was complaining of depression and migraine, and physically she was in the pink. She was a bull-cow of a woman; she weighed at least sixteen stone. It's murder, Constable—impossible, but murder."

"This be a most serious charge," Cosmos reminded him.

"Do you think I enjoy making it? It is a melancholy reflection for me," concluded the doctor, "that in future Sranihar Singh will cease to regard me fondly as his family physician. He pays well, mon."

Cosmos straddled his motorcycle, kicking the starter with care. Bumping over the cobbles of the quay, where a banana boat as white as a new bandage was loading, he rode out of town and took Nutmeg Road up the mountainside. A thousand feet vertically above his starting point, in the first swirls of mist from the rainforest, he parked the machine in front of Sranihar Singh's new pitch-pine mansion, which was painted pickle green with tomato red trim.

Below him the gorges were rank with cocoas and nutmegs, bamboos and flamboyants; a stream flashed; monkeys gossiped beneath the orchids. A tourist would have caught his breath for the beauty of the scene, but Cosmos was far more interested in his opportunity to see the inside of the Singh house, the elegance of which was enchanting.

He knocked. A maid, one of five in view, admitted him.

Sranihar Singh was mourning his departed over a breakfast of paw-paw with lime juice, sea-urchin roe on toast, bacon and eggs, and tea. In his prosperous shop—The Common Folk Own Store, He Give You Long Time Pay—in which he sold everything from galvanized washtubs to illegal narcotics, Mr. Singh was notable for his shy, virginal deportment. There his floorward gaze, his tremulous smile, his fluttering hands proclaimed his humble merchandise to be unworthy of the raggedest customer, to be mere trash upon which he was ashamed to set a price. Here, however, in his grand residence, his drooping fat seemed to have solidified, his multiple chins were held arrogantly high, and his liquid eyes flashed.

Glancing around him, Cosmos did not wonder at the change in manner. What a house! It had fully a dozen rooms, some of which appeared to be as large as eight by ten feet. Such of the rooms as were without louvers were equipped with electric light bulbs hanging from the ceiling, and every room was crammed from wall to wall with furniture imported from the second-hand shops of the United States of America. On Oturo Island a man who wished to exhibit his wealth did not strive to fill his house with beautiful furniture, since all furniture was beautiful, but merely to fill it, period; and Mr. Singh's house was so full that a person could not take a step in any direction without bumping into a straight chair, a reclaimed dining-room suite, or a pedestal lamp with a shade of beaded and fringed silk.

Flanking their breakfasting owner were two refrigerators, painted pickle green to match the exterior of the residence, a cabinet radio, and, wonder of wonders, a television set—not that there were any

programs to be seen on it, but what a thing to possess! Och!

"You wish to see me?" asked Singh, in real or feigned surprise. He did not speak with the island's garbled brogue, a legacy from Scottish sailors; his accent was quasi-Oxford, and impressive.

"Good morning, sah. Yes, sah, I must make a report on de death of your lady," said Cosmos. "I ask your pardon for the necessity at dis time."

Mr. Singh offered his visitor neither chair nor dish of tea. His eyes filled with tears. He drew a silk handkerchief from the pocket of his white sports shirt.

"In my grief," he said, "I was so confused that I gave the doctor permission to perform an autopsy. This is why you are here. He has sent you. He is jealous of me because of my success."

There was a possibility that this was true, island spite-feuds being what they were. Cosmos had already considered it. "Oh, no, sah," he said. "De police must make investigation of all demise, when dey no apparent cause."

"I am a respecter of the law," replied Singh. "What do you want?" His tone was harsh. This is a waste of time, it said, and my time is money.

"De details."

"Come with me." Sranihar Singh, rising, led the way crabwise, pushing aside masses of furniture, to a room so small it offered space only for a narrow iron cot. He switched on the hanging bulb, since the cubicle was without a window, and Cosmos saw that the varnished plywood door hung inward and aslant from its upper hinge, splintered. He noted the air-conditioner built into the rear wall. It was turned off.

"Mrs. Singh was found in here yesterday at sunset." The widower's voice, which was rather shrill, trembled. "She passed with the passing of the day."

"You were de one found her, sah?"

"Not actually. Her niece did. Her niece has been stopping with us on holiday. You will wish to speak with her."

"Aye."

Sranihar Singh clapped pudgy, yellow-palmed hands. A maid balancing a basket of laundry on her head appeared. "Bring Miss Prim-rose Chi to us," ordered Singh.

Miss Chi took her time about it, but when she arrived she was worth it. She was seventeen or eighteen years old, a Chinese with no visible admixture of African blood, and a girl so perfect of face

and form as almost to be mythical. She wore a sheath dress of thinnest turquoise silk, slit to ten inches above the knee. Her toenails, in cobweb sandals with high rhinestone heels, were silvered.

"Tell this policeman how we found Mrs. Singh, my dear," said Sranihar Singh affectionately.

Miss Chi bowed with fragile grace, like a fern bowing to the Trade Winds. "She was napping. I knocked to wake her. She did not reply. It frightened me. I called out. Mr. Singh heard me. He came at a run. He kicked down the door."

"De door was jom?" asked Cosmos.

"It was locked," said Singh, adding innocently, "from the inside."

"De inside, sah?" asked Cosmos. Dr. McIlheny had not mentioned this, specifically, although he had said that the woman was locked in.

"Look at the door. I have only first-quality hardware in my house. This lock cost six dollars American. It could be latched from the inside."

"Did Mistress Singh," asked Cosmos, "make de habit of locking sheself in? And if so, why so?"

"The maids chatter like peck-ow birds. Mrs. Singh retired to this room now and then, locking herself in, for a quiet afternoon nap in the cool."

Cosmos turned back to Primrose Chi. "Go on."

"Mrs. Singh was lying on the couch. We tried to wake her. We could not do it. We have a telephone. We called the doctor. He came on his motor tricycle. But he could not wake her, either. Then we knew she was dead."

"Can you tell me aught more?"

"No."

"You, Sranihar Singh?"

"No."

"I shall now inspect de room, please," said Cosmos. "Feel freedom to go about your personal businesses."

Cosmos had been well trained by a C.I.D. detective, and the search he made was thorough. No trap door did he find, however; no board whose nails had been loosened.

After half an hour he cycled back down the mountainside to the police station, pausing on the way to hand a summons to a speeding, careening bus—that is, a truck with benches bolted to it crosswise—appropriately named *Your Heavenly Rest*.

Saluting, he reported his findings.

"We start with an autopsy that doesn't make sense," said Commissioner Fellowes unhappily, "and now we have a locked-room mystery. Blast! You're certain? Stand easy, Cosmos. Do you have to stand to attention every bloody minute?"

"Thank you, sah. I am sartin, sah."

"If Mrs. Singh locked herself in, we jolly well haven't any murder."

"De niece confirm she lock sheself in."

"Is she lying?"

"She young to be so wicked, sah. Maybe. But could dey two kill de lady elsewhere, den lift her onto de bed for de doctor? De lady weigh like a schooner of sand."

"They could have managed it, I suppose, if they had to." Commissioner Fellowes stroked the left side of his lean, tanned jaw, then the right. "But, damn it, we haven't a shred of evidence. Not a gleam." He paused again. "You smell something, don't you?"

"I do t'ink it murder, sah."

"In that locked room?"

"Yes, sah."

"Why?"

"Psychology," said Cosmos, pronouncing it perfectly.

"Oh, come off it," said the Commissioner.

"Five year back, sah, dis Singh mon he living at Walkers', he got nothing but he fetching smile. He marry de lady ob means, he make money crooked and quick. Now he too big for he breeches, he got de manager-belly, he t'ink he can do how he please and we too slow to catch him."

"You'll have to give me something better than that."

"Okay, dis niece, dis Primrose Chi, she what de boys call *ani-mal*. She blister a mon like manchineel tree. She put he in Goat Heaven, you know? A Negro lady can have Chinese niece, yes, but dis pretty-pretty ain' no niece, I bet. Singh say yes, but dat when Mrs. Singh, she dead and can't say he falsify."

"Ah-ha," said the Commissioner. "Very well, check on the niece. Meanwhile, I think we've learned all we can from the autopsy. I'll tell Mrs. Singh's relatives they can go ahead with the funeral."

Cosmos had to stand on traffic post for the remainder of the morning, since Oturo Island's automobiles, despite the fact that they numbered only seven-all told, had a way of bashing into one another if he did not. But after his midday meal of lumbie, coo-coo, and breadfruit salad he visited the Immigration Office.

Miss Chi's entry card revealed that she had come to Oturo by

plane from Trinidad and that she was a professional entertainer, a category that might contain a number of sins or none at all. He called the Trinidad police on the shortwave. Trinidad knew Miss Chi well. Yes, she had been a dancer at the Paradise Plume Club until a month earlier, and, yes, one of her admirers had been a middle-aged East Indian with a paunch.

Having learned this much, Cosmos reflected that he had learned nothing. Sranihar Singh was much too shrewd to have told a lie in which he could be so easily caught out. Either Primrose Chi truly was a relative by marriage, or her origins were so dim that Singh was sure nobody could prove she wasn't. In any case it made little difference. A man could fall passionately in love with his wife's niece. Men had been known to fall in love with their mothers-in-law.

Inquiring around town the next morning, Cosmos learned that Mrs. Singh's closest friend had been Mrs. Percival MacGregor, whose husband sailed a decrepit schooner. Mrs. MacGregor, a motherly woman in her fifties, received him barefoot on the verandah of a trim, cobalt-blue cottage twined round and round with a gigantic chalice-lily vine. The yellow flowers were as big as vases. Had the Singh marriage, asked Cosmos, been a happy one?

"Mon, no!" replied Mrs. MacGregor vehemently. "She mouth don' taste good; she got a grief-lump in she throat all day, all de night, dat poor 'oman."

Had there been any talk, asked Cosmos, of a divorce?

No, replied Mrs. MacGregor, Mrs. Singh had been a devout Christian—a deaconess in the church, in fact. Never, never would she have given Singh a divorce. Not that Singh had not pleaded and stormed for one.

"He try to buy he way free. He tell her he gib her de ten thousand dollar she bring him when she marry he. Oh, de mean mon! He pile dat ten thousand into one hundred thousand maybe. He want to keep de change an' keep he sweetie-sweetie too."

"Primrose Chi?"

"She no primrose, mon!" stated Mrs. MacGregor, with a roll of her eyeballs. "She no primrose!"

Leaving Mrs. MacGregor, Cosmos cycled to The Common Folk Own Store, where Singh received him with haughty courtesy, and combed the place assiduously, not forgetting the warehouse out back. It was hardly to be expected that the plump East Indian would leave the murder weapon in plain sight; but on the other hand, if

he was egotistical enough to think he was invulnerable, he just might be vain enough to do it.

The shop disclosed nothing. Climbing back onto his motorcycle, Cosmos took the mountain road.

Miss Chi was lounging on the terrace in pale-yellow pajamas, which in the bright sunlight were perhaps more transparent than she knew, tweezing her exquisite eyebrows.

"Good morning," Cosmos greeted her. "Does you plan to return to Trinidad, Miss Chi, may I ask?"

Miss Chi hesitated. "Well—no," she replied.

"You go be dancer here? Dey no night clubs."

"You are embarrassing me," said Primrose Chi. "When Mr. Singh is out of mourning, he is going to marry me."

"Aye?" asked Cosmos. "He say you be Mistress Singh's niece."

"That was just a fib he was telling for my sake, until the final divorce paper came through," said Primrose coolly, "and he could announce our engagement." She bit her pretty lip worriedly. "I wish you would ask Sranihar these questions. He is the one to tell you."

"Ah, he say you not to talk to de police?"

"No, no," said Primrose hastily. "Sranihar and Mrs. Singh were divorcing—divorced, really. He asked me to come here with him. I came. But then Mrs. Singh would not move out of the house. There was one paper, from the solicitor, she still had to sign. She wouldn't leave until the paper came. I thought it would only be a few days. But she stayed on week after week. Then she died. Now we have to wait, Sranihar and I, to show respect."

"Did Mistress Singh tell you she was divorcing?"

"At first she said everything she could to upset me, then she wouldn't speak to me at all."

"Den only Sranihar himself tell you. And you believe he? About de paper and all?"

"He wouldn't tell me anything that wasn't true. He adores me."

"Quite so," agreed Cosmos, and went into the house to examine the air-conditioners.

There were three of them—expensive machines manufactured in England. With the screwdriver attached to his pocketknife he removed the plastic grille from the one in the rear room, but, carefully though he studied the interior, using his torch, he discovered no trace of chemicals in either liquid or powdered form.

Going around to the back of the house, outside, he examined the butt protruding from the wall. It was equally innocent. There were

footprints in the soft earth, but they had been left by the builders; there were too many of them.

With a sigh, Cosmos returned to his motorcycle, but instead of going down the mountainside he chugged upward, in low gear, into the rainforest.

Even among the oldest people on the island there were few Oturans who believed any longer in the talking trees. In Cosmos' own generation, indeed, he knew not one boy who had gone into the forest, selected a tree, and sat under it for an hour a day until, after two or three years, the rustling of its leaves had become a language for him, as boys had once done in Africa.

Cosmos himself would have smiled if anyone had asked him if he believed his great-grandfather's silk-cotton tree had any magic. But it was quiet in the cleft between the massive, weirdly shaped roots—they looked like drippings at the base of a tallow candle—and as peaceful as a church. It was a fine place for thinking.

His white tunic sodden from the mist, his shoes around his neck, Cosmos made his way up the steep glen and seated himself between the great linencold roots. He waited until his blood stilled.

Great-grandfather Afuta, he spoke inwardly then, it is much as I thought. The man is so madly infatuated that he was ready to promise the girl money, marriage, anything at all in order to get her to quit her job, where other men could leer at her naked flesh, and come to our island. For the girl, of course, a person of little talent looking ahead to a future of squatting toothless in the marketplace, selling mangos or salt cod, he represented the chance of a lifetime—a rich, doting husband.

But I think she is innocent of the murder. Do you agree? You do? Then it was Singh alone who did it. Now I must determine how.

I will help you if I can, boy, murmured the tree. *Go on.*

It is the air machine, Great-grandfather. It has to be. Singh fed something into the machine, from outside the house, that suffocated the woman. This much is clear. It did not have to be a poison that killed quickly; the day was a Thursday, the servants' half-holiday; he had all afternoon.

But it has to be a gas, or some substance that turns into a gas. I am not so ignorant of what it was as Sranihar Singh believes me to be. I know it was a gas, I know it had no odor. I know it was something that would kill and then vanish before it could be detected.

Whiteness, sighed the tree.

Disappointed, Cosmos frowned. "Is this your best effort, Great-grandfather?" he asked. "It tells me nothing."

White, insisted the tree, *or whiteness. I am sorry, boy, but in my day we killed honorably, with a cutlass. This is the best I can do.*

The white gleam of the long, low banana ship caught his eye when Cosmos was still high above the harbor. Apologizing to Great-grandfather Afuta for several unkindly thoughts that had passed through his brain, he turned into the quay, beeping his horn in reproof at a naked little boy who was using it for an unseemly purpose, parked his cycle on its tripod, and mounted the gangplank.

A sailor directed him to the refrigeration engineer, a young American with a brush haircut and a friendly grin, who was enjoying a cold bottle of beer in his quarters.

"Have a beer," the young man invited Cosmos. "What can I do for the law this morning?" It was noon.

Cosmos told him. "Well," said the American, "in this ship it would be a cinch. I could murder everybody aboard by turning a valve. But ashore—you say you think the guy let the air-conditioner suck the junk in from out of doors?"

"I b'lieve so, sah."

"It would have to be a darned small room."

"It smaller dan dis cabin," said Cosmos. "De 'oman she sleeping, sah, on a wee cot."

"Then if I wanted to bump her off I'd buy a big chunk of dry ice and a plastic bag—one of those plastic tarps they use to cover automobiles, say. I'd put the ice in the bag. I'd seal the mouth of the bag around the input of the air-conditioner with adhesive tape. In this climate the stuff would generate gas fast enough to keep the bag from collapsing—if not, I'd prick a few pinholes in the plastic. Carbon dioxide is heavier than air. It would pool on the floor, rising higher and higher. The woman would suffocate in her sleep. But I have two questions. Where would your murderer buy dry ice, here? And why the heck didn't the woman wake up?"

"De murderer," replied Cosmos, speculating, "import all manner of t'ing; he order what he want from Trinidad or Venezuela. De poor 'oman, so upset, so sad, maybe she nap with sleeping pill from she husband own shop."

"Well, then," said the American, "you've got it made."

Commissioner Fellowes believed in giving credit where credit was

due. "Oh, I say," he exclaimed in congratulation, when Cosmos reported. "You've done a wizard job, Cosmos, absolutely wizard!"

Cosmos' broad black chest filled to bursting point with love for his chief. Some day, he vowed, he would find the courage to tell Commissioner Fellowes about the silk-cotton tree.

"But we hab nothing for jury, sah," he said, regretful. "And dis Singh, he no confession mon. He hard as snails."

"He's a bit of a slug, all right. Perhaps we can do something with the girl," said the Commissioner. "I'm not as convinced as you are that she's innocent but, even if she is, she may have seen something, Singh fussing around out back with his contrivance—something like that."

Cosmos was reluctant to bring up psychology again. However, he made a suggestion based on it. "Sah," he said, "talk to she and he together."

"You think that's better? You may be right," acceded the Commissioner. "Very well, get on the phone to them and tell them I want them here at four o'clock."

When the pair arrived at the station, they were not offered chairs. They stood before the Commissioner's long table while the Commissioner himself, in uniform, sat behind it, and it was amazing how this simple disposition turned them into culprits standing accused before the bar of justice. Cosmos took up a post at the Commissioner's left elbow.

"Singh," said Commissioner Fellowes, wasting neither words nor courtesy, "the medical examination shows beyond doubt your wife was asphyxiated. We have no doubt, either, that you asphyxiated her—with carbon dioxide gas."

Sranihar Singh was badly surprised. For an instant his eyes flickered wildly, but he had himself under control at once. "I can't imagine why you should suspect me of such a dreadful thing," he said. "I am deeply offended, Commissioner."

"The Crown is much more deeply offended than you are," replied the Commissioner. He went on, "If you used dry ice to make the gas, as you presumably did, either you've been keeping the stuff at the cold storage plant or you bought it on Wednesday or Thursday, from somebody who has reason to keep his mouth shut. We can find your source easily. But it would be quite another matter to convict and hang you, as you well know."

"My dear Commissioner—"

Fellowes raised a hand. "You've planned cleverly. But what you've overlooked, in your calculations, is that in making them you've also made yourself an undesirable person, and I'm the one who decides who is fit and who is unfit to live on Oturo. By the authority invested in me, I hereby order you to clear off the island within twenty-four hours. And you can be sure a deportation on suspicion of homicide will follow you wherever you go. You're through, old boy."

"Commissioner," cried Singh, wringing his hands, "my shop, my house! Everything I have is here. I can't—"

With a shrug the Commissioner turned to Primrose Chi, who stood directly before him, her slim arms at her sides, in white silk brocade. "As for you, young woman, this scoundrel deceived you from the start. No divorce proceedings were undertaken—I've asked at the Crown Law Office, as you ought to have done long since. No divorce petition has been filed."

Miss Chi raised her eyes. "Sranihar," she asked, "did you do this to me?"

"The solicitor is in Trinidad!" shouted Singh. "I swear it!"

"What is his name, Sranihar?"

"Smith! Gerald Smith!"

Miss Chi laughed shortly. "Gerald was my lover before you. We are still good friends. Don't you think he would have told me?"

"Miss Chi," the Commissioner went on, "I ask you to consider the enormity of what this man did. He introduced you into his home so that his wife, poor creature, would be faced day after day with your youth, your beauty; she would realize she couldn't possibly win out against you. He set out with deliberate cruelty to break her heart and her spirit, to drive her to insanity or suicide. If you go away with him, Primrose, be certain you'll get treatment as cruel when your own beauty fades and a younger girl comes along. And may the Lord help you if you prove stubborn! He'll murder you without a blink, as he did poor Mrs. Singh."

"She told me Singh was making a fool of me," said Primrose Chi. "I would not let myself believe her. I wanted the house and the money. And a car. He promised me a car. I have been stupid. I deserve this. But have no fear, I will not go with a murderer."

Cosmos' eyes had not left Singh's sweating face. On it, now, there appeared such abjectness, such desolation, such degradation as to turn it into a caricature. There are depths of passion to which a man can descend only at the sacrifice of his manhood. Sickened, Cosmos longed to move his glance away, but he did not permit himself to.

"Primrose!" cried Singh. "I did it for you! For you, for you!"
"I loathe you," said Miss Chi, "you fat, slobbering hog!"

Singh snatched at her silken shoulders. "They're taking everything from me. I can't lose you too! I beg you, I entreat you, please don't leave me!"

Primrose wrenched away from him. Raking once, raking twice, she slashed his face with her long, silvered nails. "I am leaving here," she said. "And I am going straight to your wife's brothers. They have banana knives, they have cutlasses. Sleep well, Sranihar."

She left.

Hysterical, Sranihar Singh flung his arms high over his head and turned to the Commissioner. "I demand—" he screamed, and stopped as it occurred to him that murderers were in no moral position to demand police protection. "I'll confess. What do I care? What do I have, now? I'll confess, I'll sign a statement—"

"I must warn you," said the Commissioner formally, "that anything you say may be used against you in court. Constable, fetch your notebook."

But Cosmos did not need to fetch it. It was in the pocket of his crisp white tunic. He whipped it out.

Said Constable Cosmos McIntosh efficiently, "Yes, sah!"

"Q"

Patricia Highsmith

The Tale of Djemal

In the September 1974 issue of EQMM we brought you Patricia Highsmith's "Day of Reckoning," a crime story about chickens. "Day of Reckoning" was no ordinary story—indeed, it was so out of the ordinary that some readers considered it one of the most unusual stories we have ever published.

At the time we did not realize that Patricia Highsmith's story about chickens was one of a series of thirteen animal stories, a collection that appeared in volume form under the title of THE ANIMAL LOVER'S BOOK OF BEASTLY MURDERS. Eleven of the stories concern a cat, ferret, elephant, dog, goat, horse, monkey, rat, pig, hamsters, and pigeons. The thirteenth tale is about Djemal, a camel, and it is that story we now give you—again, a most unusual study of an animal's relationship with human beings. Patricia Highsmith has extraordinary empathy—"intellectual identification with or vicarious experiencing of feelings, thoughts, and attitudes"—for all earthly creatures, large and small. . .

Deep in the Arab desert lived Djemal, with his master Mahmet. They slept in the desert, because it was cheaper. By day they trudged, Mahmet riding, to the nearest town, Elu-Bana, where Djemal gave rides to tourists—squealing women in summer dresses and nervous men in shorts. It was about the only time Mahmet walked.

Djemal was aware that the other Arabs didn't care for Mahmet. A faint groan came from other camel drivers when he and Mahmet approached. There was much haggling over prices between Mahmet and the other drivers who would at once pounce on him. Hands would fly and voices rise madly. But no one exchanged dinars, only talked about them. Finally Mahmet would lead Djemal to the group of staring tourists, tap Djemal, and yell a command for him to kneel.

The hair on Djemal's knees, front legs, and back, was quite worn off, so his skin there looked like old leather. As for the rest of him,

he was shaggy brown with some clotted patches, with other patches nearly bare as if moths had been at him. But his big brown eyes were clear, and his generous, intelligent lips had a pleasant look as if he were constantly smiling, though this was far from the truth. At any rate, Djemal was only 17, in the prime of life, and unusually large and strong. He was shedding now because it was summer.

"Ooooooh—eeeeek!" a plump lady screamed, jolted from side to side as Djemal stood up to his impressive full height. "The ground looks miles away!"

"Don't fall! Hang on! That sand's not as soft as it looks!" warned an Englishman's voice.

Little filthy Mahmet, in dusty robes, tugged at Djemal's bridle, and off they went at walking pace, Djemal slapping his broad feet down on the sand and gazing about wherever he wished—at the white domes of the town against the blue sky, at an automobile purring along the road, at a yellow mountain of lemons by the roadside, at other camels walking or loading or unloading their human cargo.

This woman, any human being, felt like no weight at all, nothing like the huge sacks of lemons or oranges he often had to carry, or the sacks of plaster, or even the bundles of young trees that he sometimes transported far into the desert.

Once in a while even the tourists would argue in their hesitant, puzzled-sounding voices with Mahmet. Some argument about price. Everything was price. Everything came down to dinars. Dinars, paper and coin, could make men whip out daggers or raise fists and hit each other in the face.

Turbaned Mahmet in his pointed, turned-up-toed shoes and billowing old djellaba, looked more like an Arab than the Arabs. He meant himself to be a tourist attraction, photogenic—he charged a small fee to be photographed—with a gold ring in one ear and a pinched, suntanned visage which was almost hidden under bushy eyebrows and an unshaved beard. One could hardly see his mouth in all the hair. His eyes were tiny and black.

The reason the other camel drivers hated him was because he did not abide by the set price for a camel ride that the others had established. Mahmet would promise to stick to it, then if a tourist happened to approach him with a pitiable attempt to bargain—as Mahmet knew they had been advised to do—Mahmet would lower the price slightly, thus getting himself some business, and putting the tourist in such a good mood from having succeeded in bargaining,

that the tourist often tipped more than the difference at the end of the ride.

On the other hand, if business was good, Mahmet would increase his price, knowing it would be accepted, and he sometimes did this in the hearing of the other drivers. Not that the other drivers were paragons of honesty, but they had informal agreements, and mostly they stuck to them. For Mahmet's dishonesty Djemal sometimes suffered a stone thrown against his rump, a stone meant for Mahmet.

After a good tourist day, which often went on till nearly dark, Mahmet would tie Djemal up to a palm tree in town and treat himself to a meal of couscous in a shack of a restaurant which had a terrace and a squawking parrot. Meanwhile Djemal might not even have had any water, because Mahmet took care of his own needs first, and Djemal would nibble the tree leaves he could reach. Mahmet ate alone at a table, avoided by the other camel drivers who sat at another table together, making a lot of merry noise. One of them played a stringed instrument between courses. Mahmet chewed his lamb bones in silence and wiped his fingers on his robes. He left no tip.

Maybe he took Djemal to the public fountain, maybe he didn't, but he rode while Djemal walked into the desert to the clump of trees where Mahmet made his camp every night. Djemal could not always see in the darkness, but his sense of smell guided him to the bundle of clothing of Mahmet, the rolled-up tent, the leather waterbags, all of which were permeated with Mahmet's own sweaty, sharp scent.

In the early mornings it was usually lemon-hauling in the hot summer months. Thank Allah, Mahmet thought, the government had established "camel ride" hours for the tourists, ten to twelve in the mornings, six to nine evenings, so it left the drivers free to earn money during the day, and to do all the tourist business in concentrated hours.

Now as the big orange sun sank on the horizon of sand, Mahmet and Djemal were out of hearing of the muezzin in Elu-Bana. Besides, Mahmet had his transistor radio on, a little gadget not much bigger than his fist, which he could prop on his shoulder amid folds of the djellaba. Now it was a wailing and endless song, with a man singing in falsetto. Mahmet hummed, as he spread a tattered rug on the sand and threw more rags on the top. This was his bed.

"Djemal! Put yourself there!" said Mahmet, pointing to a side he had discovered was windward of the place where he intended to

sleep. Djemal gave out considerable heat, as well as blocking the gritty breeze.

Djemal went on eating dry brush several yards away. Mahmet came over and whacked him with a braided leather whip. It did not hurt Djemal. It was a ritual, which he let continue for a few minutes before he tore himself away from the dark green shrubs. Fortunately he wasn't thirsty that night.

"Oy-yah-yah-yah," said the transistor.

Djemal knelt down, turning himself slightly against the wishes of Mahmet, so that the light wind very nearly struck him straight in the tail. Djemal didn't want wind up his nose. He stretched his long neck out, put his head down, almost closed his nostrils, and closed his eyes completely. After a while he felt Mahmet settling against his left side, tugging at the old red blanket in which he wrapped himself, settling his sandaled heels in the sand. Mahmet slept as he rested, almost sitting up.

Sometimes Mahmet read a bit in the Koran, mumbling. He could hardly read at all, but he knew a lot of it by heart, since childhood. His school had consisted, as the schools consisted even now, of a roomful of children sitting on the floor repeating phrases uttered by a tall man in a djellaba who prowled among them, taking long strides over their heads, reading phrases from the Koran. This wisdom, these words were like poetry to Mahmet—pretty enough when one read it, but of no use in everyday life.

This evening Mahmet's Koran—a chunky little book with curled corners and nearly obliterated print—remained in his woven knapsack along with sticky dates and a hunk of stale bread. Mahmet was thinking of the forthcoming National Camel Race. He scratched a flea somewhere under his left arm.

The camel race started tomorrow evening and lasted for a week. It went from Elu-Bana to Khassa, a big port and a major city of the country, where there were even more tourists. The drivers camped out at night, of course, and were supposed to carry their food and water supplies, and make a stop at Souk Mandela, where the camels were to drink, then push on.

Mahmet went over his plans. No stop at Souk Mandela, for one thing. That was why he was making Djemal go dry now. When Djemal drank tomorrow, and again just before the race started in the evening, he could go seven days, Mahmet thought, without water, and Mahmet hoped to finish the race in six, anyway.

* Traditionally the Elu-Bana to Khassa race was very close, drivers

flogging their camels at the finish. The prize was 300 dinars, quite enough to be interesting.

Mahmet pulled the red blanket over his head and felt secure and self-sufficient. He hadn't a wife, he hadn't even a family—rather he had one in a faraway town, but they disliked him, and he them, so Mahmet never thought about them. He'd stolen as a boy, and the police had come a few times too often to his family's house, warning him and his parents, so Mahmet had left at the age of 13.

From then on, he'd led a nomadic existence, shining shoes in the capital, working for a while as waiter until he was caught stealing out of the till, then picking pockets in museums and mosques, then as runner for a fence during which time he'd been shot in the calf by a policeman's bullet, giving him a permanent limp. Mahmet was 37 or 38, maybe even 40, he wasn't quite sure.

When he won the National Camel Race money, he intended to make a down payment on a little house in Elu-Bana. He'd seen the two-room white house with running cold water and a tiny fireplace. It was up for sale cheap, because the owner had been murdered in his bed, and nobody wanted to live there . . .

The next day Djemal was surprised by the relative lightness of his work. He and Mahmet cruised along the lemon mountains on the outskirts of Elu-Bana, and Djemal's two huge sacks were loaded and unloaded four times before the sun went down, but that was nothing. Ordinarily Djemal would have been prodded much faster along the roads. "Ho-ya! Djemal!" someone shouted.

"Mahmet! F-wissssss!"

There was excitement. Djemal didn't know why. Men clapped their hands. Praise or disapproval? Djemal was aware that no one liked his master, and Djemal took some of this ill-feeling, therefore apprehension, on himself. Djemal was ever wary against a sneaky blow, something thrown at him, meant for Mahmet. The huge trucks pulled out, loaded with lemons brought by scores of camels. Drivers sat resting, leaning against their camels' bellies or squatting on their heels. As Djemal walked out of the compound, one camel for no reason stretched his head forward and nipped Djemal's rump.

Djemal turned quickly and lifted a protruding upper lip, baring powerful long front teeth, and snapped back, not quite catching the camel's nose. The driver on the other camel was nearly thrown by his camel's recoil, and cursed Mahmet roundly.

Mahmet gave back as good as he got.

Though Djemal was already full of water, Mahmet led him again

to the town trough, Djemal drank a little, slowly, pausing to lift his head and sniff the breeze; he smelled the perfume of tourists from afar. And he also heard loud music, not unusual as transistor radios blared all day from every direction, but this music was bigger and more solid. Djemal felt a wallop on his left hind leg. Mahmet was walking, in front of him now, pulling his rein.

There were flags, a grandstand, tourists, and a couple of loudspeakers out of which the music came. All this at the edge of the desert. Camels were lined up. A man was speaking, his voice unnaturally loud. The camels looked good. Was it a race?

Djemal had once been in a race with Mahmet riding him, and Djemal remembered that he had run faster than the others. That was last year, when Mahmet had acquired Djemal. Djemal had a fleeting recollection of his first master, who had trained him. This man had been tall, kind, and rather old. He had argued with Mahmet, doubtless over dinars, and Mahmet had won. That was how Djemal saw it, because Mahmet had taken Djemal away with him.

Djemal was suddenly in a line with the other camels. A whistle blew. Mahmet whacked him, and Djemal loped ahead, taking a minute or two to get into stride. Then he was galloping straight into the setting sun. He was ahead. It was easy. Djemal began to breathe regularly, settling down to keep the pace for a long time, if necessary. Where were they going? Djemal could not smell leaves or water, and he was unfamiliar with the terrain.

Ka-pa-la-pop, ka-pa-la-pop . . . The hoofbeats of the camels behind Djemal faded out of hearing. Djemal went a trifle slower. Mahmet did not whack him. Djemal heard Mahmet chuckle a little. The moon rose and they kept on, Djemal walking now. He was a little tired. They stopped, Mahmet drank from his watersack, ate something, and bundled himself up against Djemal's side as usual. But there was no tree, no shelter where they lay that night. The land was flat and wide.

The next morning they set off at dawn, Mahmet having had a mug of sweet coffee brewed on his spirit lamp. He switched on his transistor, and held it in the crook of his leg which was cocked over Djemal's shoulder. Not a camel was in sight behind him. Nevertheless, Mahmet urged Djemal on at a fair pace. Judging from Djemal's firm hump behind him, he was good for four or five days more without showing any sign of flagging. Still Mahmet looked to right and left for any lines of trees, any kind of foliage that could give shelter from the sun, however brief.

When noon came, they had to stop. The heat of the sun had begun to penetrate even Mahmet's turban, and sweat ran into his eyebrows. For the first time Mahmet threw a cloth over Djemal's head to shelter it from the sun, and they rested till nearly four in the afternoon. Mahmet had no watch, but he could tell time quite well by the sun.

The next day was the same, except that Mahmet and Djemal found some trees—but no water. Mahmet knew the territory vaguely. Either he had been over it years before, or someone had told him about it, he couldn't quite remember. There was no water except at Souk Mandela, where the contestants were supposed to stop. That was a detour off the straight course, and Mahmet had no intention of stopping there. On the other hand, he thought it best to give Djemal an extra long rest at midday and to make up for this by traveling far into the night. This they did. Mahmet navigated by the stars.

Djemal could have done all right for five days without water, with moderate pace and load, but Djemal was often loping. By the noon-day rest of the sixth day Djemal was feeling the strain. Mahmet mumbled the Koran. There was a wind, which blew Mahmet's coffee brewer flame out a couple of times.

Djemal rested with his tail directly toward the wind, his nostrils open just enough to breathe.

It was the edge of a windstorm, not the storm itself, Mahmet saw. He patted Djemal's head briefly. Mahmet was thinking that the other camels and their drivers were in the worst of the storm, since the gloom lay in the direction of Souk Mandela to the north. Mahmet was hoping they'd all be delayed.

Mahmet was wrong, as he discovered on the seventh day. This was the day they were supposed to finish the race. Mahmet started at dawn when the sand was so whirling around him that he didn't bother trying to prepare coffee; instead he chewed a few coffee beans. Mahmet began to think that the storm had moved down to him, on his direct route to Khassa, and that his competitors had perhaps not done too badly by stopping at Souk Mandela for water, then resuming a direct course to Khassa, because this would put them at the northern edge of the storm, not in the middle.

It was difficult for Djemal to make good progress, since he had to keep his nostrils half shut against the sand and consequently couldn't breathe well. Mahmet, riding on his shoulders and leaning over his neck, flogged him nervously to go ever faster. Djemal sensed

that Mahmet was scared. If Djemal couldn't see or smell where he was going, how could Mahmet? Was Mahmet out of water? Maybe.

Djemal's right shoulder became sore, then bled from Mahmet's whip. It hurt worse there, which was why Mahmet didn't try the other shoulder, Djemal supposed. Djemal knew Mahmet well by now. He knew that Mahmet intended to be paid somehow for his efforts, for Djemal's efforts, or Mahmet wouldn't be putting himself to so much discomfort. Djemal also had a vague notion that he was in competition with the other camels he had seen at Elu-Bana, because Djemal had been forced to do other "races" in the form of running faster than other camels toward a group of tourists when Mahmet had spotted them half a mile away.

"Hay-yee! Hay-yee!" Mahmet cried, bouncing up and down and wielding the whip.

At least they were getting out of the sandstorm. The pale haze of the sun could be seen now and then, still a long way above the horizon. Djemal stumbled and fell, tossing Mahmet off. Djemal got a mouthful of sand and would have loved to lie there for several minutes, recovering, but Mahmet flogged him up, shouting.

Mahmet had lost his transistor, and went scrambling and scuffling about for it in the sand. When he found it, he kicked Djemal unmercifully in the rump because Djemal had lain down again.

Mahmet cursed.

Djemal did likewise, blowing his breath out and baring his two formidable front teeth before he gradually hauled himself up with a slow bitter dignity. Stupefied by heat and thirst, Djemal saw Mahmet fuzzily, and was exasperated enough to attack him, except that he was weak from fatigue. Mahmet whacked him and gave him the command to kneel. Djemal knelt, and Mahmet mounted.

They were moving again. Djemal's feet became ever heavier and dragged in the sand. But he could now smell people. Water. Then he heard music—the ordinary wailing music of Arabian transistors, but louder, as if several were playing in unison. Mahmet whacked Djemal again and again on the shoulder, shouting encouragement. Djemal saw no reason to exert himself, since the goal was plainly in sight, but he did his best to walk fast, hoping that this would make Mahmet ease up on the whip.

"Yeh—yah!" The cheers grew louder.

Djemal's mouth was now open and dry. Just before he reached the people his eyesight failed him. So did his leg muscles. His knees, then his side hit the sand. The hump on his back sagged limp, empty

like his mouth and his stomach. And Mahmet beat him, yelling.

The crowd both moaned and yelled. Djemal didn't care. He felt he was dying. Why didn't someone bring him water? Mahmet was now lighting matches under Djemal's heels. Djemal barely twitched. He would have bitten through Mahmet's neck with pleasure, but he hadn't the strength.

Then Djemal lost consciousness.

With fury and resentment Mahmet saw a camel and its driver walk across the finish line. Then another. The camels looked tired, but they were not dead-tired like Djemal. There was no room for pity in Mahmet's mind. Djemal had failed him. Djemal who was supposed to be so strong.

When a couple of the camel drivers jeered at Mahmet and made nasty remarks about his not having given his camel water—a fact which was obvious—Mahmet cursed them back. Mahmet threw a bucket of water onto Djemal's head and brought him to. Then Mahmet watched, grinding his teeth, as the winner of the race—a fat old swine who had always snubbed Mahmet in Elu-Bana—received his prize in the form of a paper check. Naturally the government wasn't going to hand out that money in cash, because it might be stolen in the crowd.

Djemal drank water that night and ate a bit. Mahmet did not give him food, but there were bushes and trees where they spent the night. They were on the edge of the city of Khassa. The next day, having taken on provisions—bread, dates, water, and a couple of dry sausages for himself—Mahmet started off with Djemal across the desert again. Djemal was still a little tired and could have rested for another day. Was Mahmet going to stop somewhere for water this time? Djemal hoped so. At least they weren't racing.

Near noon, when they had to rest under shade, Djemal's right front leg gave under him as he was kneeling for Mahmet to dismount. Mahmet tumbled onto the sand, then jumped up and struck Djemal a couple of times on the head with his whip handle.

"Stupid!" Mahmet shouted in Arabic.

Djemal bit at the whip and caught it. When Mahmet lunged for the whip, Djemal bit again and got Mahmet's wrist.

Mahmet screamed.

Djemal got to his feet, inspired to further attack. How he hated this smelly little creature who considered himself his "master"!

"Aaaah! Back! Down!" Mahmet yelled, and brandished the whip, retreating.

Djemal walked steadily toward Mahmet, his teeth bared, his eyes big and red with fury. Mahmet ran and took shelter behind the bending trunk of a date tree. Djemal circled the tree. He could smell the sharp stink of Mahmet's terror.

Mahmet was snatching off his old djellaba. He pulled off his turban and flung both at Djemal.

Surprised, Djemal bit into the smelly clothes, shaking his head as if he had his teeth in Mahmet's neck. Djemal snorted and attacked the turban, now unwound in a long dirty length. He ate part of it and stomped his big front feet on the rest.

Mahmet, behind his tree, began to breathe more easily. He knew that camels could vent their wrath on the clothes of the man they hated, and that was usually the end of it. He hoped so. He didn't fancy walking back to Khassa. He wanted to go to Elu-Bana, which he considered "home."

Djemal at last lay down. He was tired, almost too tired to bother putting himself in the patchy shade under the date tree. He slept...

Mahmet prodded him awake, carefully. The sun was setting. Djemal nipped at him, missing. Mahmet thought it wise to ignore it.

"Up, Djemal! Up—and we go!" said Mahmet.

Djemal plodded. He plodded on into the night, feeling the faint trail more than seeing it in the sand. The night was cool.

On the third day they arrived at Souk Mandela, a busy market town, though small. Mahmet had decided to sell Djemal here: So he made for the open market where braziers, rugs, jewelry, camel saddles, pots and pans, and just about everything was for sale and on display on the ground. Camels were for sale too, at one corner. He led Djemal there, Mahmet being careful to walk far enough ahead so that Djemal would not bite him.

"Cheap," Mahmet said to the dealer. "Six hundred dinars. He's a fine camel, you can see that. And he just won the Elu-Bana to Khassa race!"

"Oh, yes? That's not the way we heard it!" said a turbaned camel driver who was listening, and a couple of others laughed. "He collapsed!"

"Yes, we heard you didn't stop for water, you crooked old fool!" said someone else.

"Even so—" Mahmet began, and dodged as Djemal's teeth came at him.

"Ha! Ha! Even a camel doesn't like this one!" said one old beard.

"Four hundred!" Mahmet screamed. "With the saddle!"

A man pointed to Djemal's beaten shoulder which was still bloody and on which flies had settled, as if it were a serious and permanent defect, and offered 250 dinars.

Mahmet accepted. Cash. The man had to go home to get it. Mahmet waited sullenly in some shade, watching the dealer and another man leading Djemal to the market water trough. He had lost a good camel—lost money, even more painful—but Mahmet was damned glad to be rid of Djemal. His life was worth more than money, after all.

That afternoon Mahmet caught an uncomfortable bus to Elu-Bana. He was carrying his gear, empty watersacks, spirit lamp, cooking pot, and blanket. He slept like the dead in an alley behind the restaurant where he often ate couscous. The next morning, with a clear vision of his bad luck, and the stinging memory of the low price he had got for one of the best camels in the country, Mahmet pilfered from a tourist's car. He found a plaid blanket and a bonus beneath it—a camera—a silver flask in the glove compartment, and a brown-paper-wrapped parcel that contained a small rug evidently just bought in the market. This theft took less than a minute, because the car was unlocked. It was in front of a shabby bar, and a couple of barefoot adolescent boys sitting at a table in the sand merely laughed when they saw Mahmet doing it.

Mahmet sold his loot before noon for 70 dinars—the camera was a good German one—which made him feel slightly better. With his own cache of dinars which he carried with him, sewn into a fold of blanket, Mahmet now had nearly 500. He could buy another camel of sorts, not as good as Djemal who had cost him 400 dinars. And he would have enough to put something down on the little house he wanted. The tourist season was on, and Mahmet needed a camel to earn money, because camel driving was the only thing he knew.

Meanwhile Djemal had fallen into good hands. A poor but decent man called Chak had bought him to add to his string of three. Chak mainly hauled lemons and oranges and did other kinds of transport work with his camels, but in the tourist season he also gave camel rides. Chak was delighted with Djemal's grace and willingness with the tourists. Because Djemal was so tall, he was often preferred by the tourists who wanted "a view."

Djemal's sore shoulder was now quite healed; he was well fed, not overworked, and content with his new master and his life. His memory of Mahmet was growing dimmer, mainly because he never en-

countered him—Elu-Bana had many routes in and out of it. Djemal often worked miles away, and Chak's home was a few miles outside of town, where Djemal slept with the other camels under a shelter near the house where Chak lived with his family.

One day in early autumn, when the weather was a trifle cooler and most of the tourists had gone, Djemal picked up the scent of Mahmet. Djemal was just then entering the big fruit market in Elu-Bana, carrying a heavy load of grapefruit. Huge trucks were being loaded with boxes of dates and pineapples, and the scene was noisy with men talking and yelling and transistors everywhere were blaring different programs. Djemal didn't see Mahmet, but the hair on his neck rose a little, and he expected a blow out of nowhere. He knelt at Chak's command, and the burdens slipped from his sides.

Then he saw Mahmet just a camel's length in front of him. Djemal got to his feet. Mahmet saw Djemal also, took a second or two to make sure he was Djemal, then jumped back.

"So—your old camel, eh?" another camel driver said to Mahmet, jerking a thumb toward Djemal. "Still afraid of him, Mahmet?"

"I never was afraid of him!" Mahmet shouted.

"Ha-ha!"

A couple of other drivers joined the conversation.

Djemal saw Mahmet twitch, talking all the while. Djemal could smell him well, and his hatred rose afresh. Djemal moved toward Mahmet.

"Ha! Ha! Watch out, Mahmet!" laughed a turbaned driver, who was a little drunk on wine.

Mahmet retreated.

Djemal followed, walking. He continued to walk, even though he heard Chak calling him. Then Djemal broke into a lope, as Mahmet vanished behind a truck. When Djemal reached the truck, Mahmet darted toward a small house, a shed of some kind for the market drivers.

To Mahmet's horror the shed door was locked. He ran behind the shed.

Djemal bore down and seized Mahmet's djellaba and part of his back in his teeth. Mahmet fell, and Djemal stomped him, and stomped him again.

"Look! It's a fight!"

A dozen men, then more gathered around to watch, laughing, at first urging one another to go in and put a stop to it—but nobody did. On the contrary, someone passed a jug of red wine around.

Mahmet screamed. Djemal now came down with his foot again, hard. Then it was over. Mahmet stopped moving.

The crowd howled. They were safe; the camel wasn't going to attack *them*, and to a man they had detested Mahmet, who was not only stingy but dishonest, even with people whom he led to think were his friends.

"What a camel! What's his name?"

"Djemal. Ha-ha!"

"Used to be Mahmet's camel," someone repeated, as if the whole crowd didn't know that.

At last Chak burst through. "Djemal! Ho! Stop, Djemal! This is terrible!" cried Chak.

The men surrounded Chak, telling him it wasn't terrible, telling him they would get rid of the body, somewhere. No, no, there was no need to call the police. Absurd! Have some wine, Chak! Even some of the truck drivers had joined them, smiling with sinister amusement at what had happened behind the shed.

Djemal, head high now, had begun to calm down. He could smell blood along with the stench of Mahmet. Haughtily he stepped over his victim, lifting each foot carefully, and rejoined his master Chak, who was still nervous.

"No, no," Chak was saying, because the men, all a bit tipsy now, were offering Chak 700 and more dinars for Djemal. Chak was shaken by the events, but at the same time he was proud of Djemal, and wouldn't have parted with him for 1000 dinars at that moment.

Djemal smiled. He lifted his head and looked coolly through his long-lashed eyes toward the horizon. Men patted his flanks, his shoulders. Mahmet was dead. Djemal's anger, like a poison, was out of his blood. He followed Chak, without a lead, as Chak walked away, looking back and calling to him. Djemal had had his revenge.

"Q"

Francis M. Nevins, Jr.

The Kumquats Affair

Like so many other detectives in fiction (if not all), Loren Mensing can't go anywhere without bumping into crime and mystery—it goes with the territory. Here he is in New York City, attending an annual meeting of a law professors' organization, when he becomes involved in The Kumquats Case, a neatly dovetailed puzzler that plays fair with the reader: all the clues are deftly planted—if you can spot them . . .

Detective: LOREN MENSING

The first and last time Loren Mensing saw the man with the boil on his nose was when Loren stepped out of the self-service elevator on the eighth floor and boil-nose stepped in. Loren had come to New York City for the annual meeting of a law professors' organization, but in midafternoon he'd slipped out of the convention hotel, subwaysed downtown, and trudged through slush-blanketed streets to the old twelve-story office building on Park and Nineteenth. As the elevator door whispered open and Loren emerged, boil-nose elbowed past him into the empty cage and the door slid shut.

"New York manners," Loren muttered, and walked down the hallway to a fumed-oak door that read TOMMY HAGEN ENTERPRISES, INC. and beneath that legend the single word ENTER. A huge movie poster of the quintessential Tommy dominated each wall of the foyer: the ageless face atop the reed-thin body, the eyes that seemed to stare at something no one else could see, the fingers of both hands intertwined-like pretzels in the famous Hagen gesture.

A flame-haired receptionist polished her nails at a blondwood desk, and a few feet to her left a circular staircase with wrought-iron railings wound upward to the next floor. The receptionist took Loren's name and spoke it into the communicator. Within seconds Joyce Brook burst into the foyer with arms outspread in delight and

enveloped him in a vigorous hug.

"God, Loren, it's been a hundred years since you've been in town! Come on, let me show you my domain. I was just about to call a meeting with my people but—wait, damn it, I will have that meeting, Loren, and I want you in it too!"

She turned to the fiery-haired receptionist. "Donna, buzz Beau and Andy and Kathy. Powwow in my office in five minutes. Come on, Loren." She scooped him up by the arm and gave him a breathless guided tour while propelling him along an inner corridor.

"That's Beau's office, Beau Douglas, he takes care of theatrical and TV revivals of Tommy's movies, and this one belongs to Kathy Ellison, she's my assistant manager, you'll like her, and Andy, that's Andy Lauer, he's in charge of licensing Tommy's image on everything from T-shirts to cereal. Andy's office is up at the top of that spiral staircase, you see there used to be a law firm here and they had their library upstairs—and here we are!"

She pointed Loren to a shiny black leather armchair in her own corner office and seated herself behind the double-sized mahogany desk.

Loren and Joyce had met in college fifteen years ago. With her six-foot height and air of aggressive competence and ambition, she had not been attractive to many men, but she and Loren had seen something in each other, although after graduation they'd drifted apart.

"And you're in charge of the whole East Coast operation, marketing Tommy's old movies and his image. Tremendous." Loren folded his heavy overcoat across the arm of his chair. "Lot of money in it?"

"Bundles! You know, he's been dead twenty years now and everyone still goes ape over him. W. C. Fields, the Marx Brothers, and Tommy Hagen. There are all sorts of books about him, people watch his movies over and over, you can use the image to sell anything. They're marketing a Tommy Hagen peanut butter in the spring. There's only one thing wrong." Her room-filling voice dropped to almost a whisper. "And that's why I'm so glad you dropped by. Loren, someone's trying to sabotage Tommy Hagen Enterprises." She bit down hard on her lower lip. "And it's getting scary."

"Tell me," Loren said simply.

She hunched forward, nesting her chin in her fists. "About a month ago little things began going wrong around the office. Files misplaced. Business appointments being canceled over the phone

and then later we found out it was an impostor who called and the appointment hadn't been canceled at all. That kind of thing. Then it got nastier."

"What happened?"

She drew back the handle of the upper right drawer of her desk. "A week ago Tuesday I came to work as usual and opened this drawer to get something, and there were a couple of dozen big fat worms crawling over my stationery. Somebody had broken into the office and put them in the desk during the night."

"Literally broken in?" Loren asked. "Did he leave traces? I assume you called the police."

"No, I didn't bother, and there weren't any traces. This is an old building and you can get into any office by using a credit card on the lock. We're tied into an electronic security system now and that kind of thing can't happen here again. But as if all this wasn't enough harassment, now I've got a new kind of mess on my hands. A legal mess."

Before Loren could ask for details there was a knock on the door and he rose as two men and a woman filed in and Joyce introduced him to her associates. Beauregard Douglas was a dapper bantam-weight in his early thirties, elegantly attired, with dark hair cut short enough to please a drill sergeant. Tall gawky Andy Lauer had a high forehead, a habit of slouching against walls, and a preference for knit sweaters rather than suit jackets. Kathy Ellison—short, delightfully plump, blonde and cuddly-looking—contrasted startlingly with Joyce, causing Loren to wonder if that was why she'd been hired as Joyce's assistant manager.

When they were settled Joyce popped a cigarette between her lips without lighting it. "As it happens, gang, Loren is a law professor and can probably explain the mess we're in better than I can. Loren, tell us about Section 24 of the Copyright Act."

Loren had taught a copyright class two semesters ago and had an excellent memory. "Well, I'm oversimplifying more than I would in school, but a copyright runs for twenty-eight years and then is renewable for another twenty-eight. The two periods are completely separate entities. If I copyright a story, say, and then I die before the renewal period, Section 24 determines who takes the renewal interest. The author's surviving spouse and children have the highest priority."

"All right, now here's a movie trivia question for you. Who is Obed Middleton?"

Loren shook his head in perplexity. "Never heard of him."

Joyce nodded at Kathy Ellison and her assistant answered the question in a voice as melodious as Chinese wind bells. "Obed Middleton was a hog raiser in Enid, Oklahoma. Around 1930 he had a short story published in a pulp magazine. One of Tommy Hagen's producers happened to read the story and the studio paid three hundred dollars for the movie rights. Then Tommy and the writers twisted the story around and turned it into *Kumquats*."

"God, what a memory!" Beau Douglas said beneath his breath, and looked at Kathy as if she were a witch. Her performance had given Loren a clearer insight into why she was the assistant manager, but the exact nature of the legal problem still eluded him. He'd seen *Kumquats* a dozen times and knew that it was Tommy Hagen's most famous movie, a permanent comedy classic like the Marx Brothers' *Duck Soup* or Fields' *It's a Gift*.

"Now Tommy had foresight," Joyce picked up the thread of the story. "He bought up his pictures from the studio in the late forties, just before the big TV boom. Then he died in 1955 and his will left everything to the boy he'd adopted. The lawyers set up Tommy Hagen Enterprises, and since then Keith, the son, has made a mint out of licensing Tommy's image on products and renting the movies to TV stations. Until now, that is."

"But where does Section 24—" Loren squeezed his eyes shut in concentration.

"Wait a minute, I think I see."

"Obed Middleton died in 1950," Joyce said. "In 1958 the renewal came due on his story and the widow renewed the copyright, just for sentimental reasons I guess. Then a few months ago a chiseler named Orval Cupples went to the nursing home in Tulsa where the old woman is dying by inches and paid her two hundred dollars for the movie rights in that story during the renewal period."

"But the author, Obed Middleton, had died before the renewal period began," Loren pointed out. "So the law treats the renewal period as a separate entity, and the deal Obed made with Tommy Hagen's studio should have been negotiated with the widow a long time ago."

Andy Lauer jerked erect from his slouch as if an alarm had gone off in his ear. "You mean to say Tommy Hagen Enterprises never bothered to do that before it licensed all those hundreds of showings of *Kumquats* on TV? And all those showings were infringements of her copyright?"

"And now the widow's rights belong to this Cupples," Loren reminded him.

"I had an appointment with Cupples right here an hour ago," Joyce continued, her tone hinting that she hadn't enjoyed the experience. "Ratty-looking type with an ugly boil on his nose." *Mr. New York Manners*, Loren recalled. "He wants \$100,000 plus a cut of all income from future showings of the picture. Otherwise he'll sue us for all those infringements and keep us from ever renting the picture again. And damn it, we'll probably have to pay. *Kumquats* is the keystone of the Hagen movies. We can't rent a block of them to a TV station without that one."

"It would be like an Orson Welles retrospective without *Citizen Kane*," Kathy Ellison volunteered brightly.

"What are you going to do about Cupples?" Beau demanded.

Joyce answered him without hesitation. "Call Sheldon Rogers, the copyright lawyer, and make an appointment for tomorrow if I can. Then I have to call Keith in L.A. and fill him in." She pointed her unlit cigarette in Loren's direction. "How about coming with me tomorrow?"

Loren pulled a dog-eared convention schedule from his breast pocket. "Nothing exciting tomorrow. Sure, count me in."

On the street, while he was waving for a cab to take him back to the convention hotel, a thought occurred to him. He shoved open the half-rusted door of an empty phone booth and swung up the directory on its dirty chain. The white pages listed CUPPLES ORVAL TALENT AGENCY with an address in the mid-Forties and a phone number. There was no other listing for that name in the Manhattan directory, which meant either that Cupples lived elsewhere or had an unlisted home phone.

In his hotel room after dinner he called an old acquaintance who had been a fixture in the New York entertainment world for decades. "Yeah, I know who he is. Small-time grifter, calls himself a talent agent, makes his bread booking over-the-hill strippers into cheap clubs in Jersey and Pennsylvania. Why you want to know?"

Loren answered the question with another. "Was he ever a lawyer? Disbarred maybe?"

"No way," his informant said. "I doubt if he ever got through high school."

"Does he have any close associates who are entertainment lawyers?"

"Negative. In fact, the guy doesn't have close associates, period. Or distant associates. He's a real loner and as devious as they come. If you're in a deal with him, my advice is to get out."

Loren expressed thanks and hung up. The longer he thought about what he had learned, the more his puzzlement grew.

"... And so the descendants of the person whose story was the basis of a film have the power to tie up the film fifty years after it was made. Congress didn't realize that would be the result when it passed the Copyright Act in 1909, but the courts have construed Section 24 in that manner. Just recently the city's educational television station lost a similar infringement suit over an old Rudolph Valentino film."

Sheldon Rogers, Esq.—tall, graying, velvet-voiced, his every word and movement a study in cool deliberation—drew a long cigar from its pale-tan tube and touched flame to the tip, puffing deeply as if to refresh himself after his discourse on copyright. Loren looked down at the discarded tube on the lawyer's desk blotter and read the brand name Montecruz. He'd heard connoisseurs call it the finest cigar in the world.

"It's a shame Pop didn't know about Section 24 when he bought his old pictures from the studio. He could have paid off Mrs. Middleton himself." Beneath the deep California tan there was a ruthless look to Keith Hagen that suggested more loudly than words that whoever stood in his way ran a heavy risk.

Loren had taken an instant dislike to Tommy Hagen's adopted son from the moment they had met this morning in Rogers' anteroom. Keith had arrived on the night flight from Los Angeles, but he looked no less dangerous for lack of sleep.

"Good old klutzy Pop, going into hock to buy up his pictures because he was sure they'd make a mint someday, and then he blows the legal red tape."

With every word Keith spoke, Loren felt increasing delight at the fact that Orval Cupples was tying up the young man's income from his father's masterpiece. Beside Loren on the richly upholstered couch, Joyce Brook chewed her lower lip.

Sheldon Rogers broke the uncomfortable silence. "I take it, Mr. Hagen, that you want me to negotiate with Cupples and persuade him to reduce his price to what I would consider his rock-bottom figure, and then close with him?"

"Right now." Keith snapped out the words savagely.

"Let me try his office." The copyright attorney pressed a button on his phone and instructed an unseen secretary to put through the call for him. When his instrument buzzed he lifted it delicately to his ear. "Good morning, may I speak to Mr. Cupples please . . . Sheldon Rogers, I'm an attorney representing Tommy Hagen Enterprises . . . He what? My God . . . No, just a business matter."

The lawyer dropped his phone into its plastic nest as if it were white-hot and gazed bleakly at his three visitors. "That was a police officer. Orval Cupples was found dead by his secretary when she came to work this morning. Murdered. They're going to want to know what my business with him was."

"That's privileged. You tell them nothing." Beneath his tan Keith Hagen had turned fishbelly-white.

"You forget," Loren pointed out with a certain perverse satisfaction, "that Mr. Rogers gave the name of Tommy Hagen Enterprises over the phone just now. They don't need him or his privileged information. They can go straight to you and Joyce, and when they do they're going to find out that you had one hundred thousand reasons to kill Cupples. What time did your plane get in this morning?"

"Landed at JFK about 2:45 A.M.," Keith snarled. "Why?"

"You'd better pray Cupples died before then," Loren told him.

They cabbed downtown in chilly silence and trooped into the lobby of the office building on Park and Nineteenth just as an elevator door slid shut and the indicator began to ascend. "Damn new elevators," Joyce remarked. "They're built so they have to go all the way to the top before they come down again." She stamped her feet impatiently in the underheated lobby and the three of them watched the indicator rise to twelve, then crawl downward.

As soon as the cage reached ground level they piled in and Loren punched the button for the eighth floor. They marched into the Hagen Enterprises suite just as a bulky lizard-skinned man in a shapeless gray suit with a topcoat slung over his arm was coming down the spiral staircase. When he saw the newcomers enter he took the last steps two at a time and blocked their path, flipping open a worn leather case.

"Lieutenant Genetelli, Homicide. I've been waiting for you to get back. Are you Joyce Brook?"

Whatever Joyce was about to say caught in her throat and she nodded, her face muscles tense.

"I've been upstairs questioning Lauer, your products man. You were at this lawyer Rogers' office when Rogers called Orval Cupples for an appointment, weren't you?"

"We all were," Loren replied for her. He introduced himself and Keith Hagen followed suit, and the four strode down the inner corridor to Joyce's office.

"I came down from Cupples' shop to find out what I could about Tommy Hagen Enterprises." The lieutenant draped his overcoat across his lap as he sank into a chair. "We found some memoranda about this place in Cupples' private papers. Looks as if he'd bought up some rights you needed and was holding you up for a bunch of money, huh?"

"If you know so much you don't need to ask," Keith snapped.

"Now wait a minute." Loren stepped into the breach. "Maybe we can help more if you'll tell us a bit more. Could you at least let us know when and how Cupples was killed?"

Genetelli rubbed the stubble on his pouchy cheeks. "I don't suppose that's a secret. The medical examiner says he died between 7:00 and 8:00 A.M. His secretary found him on the floor when she got to work at 8:15. His skull was fractured with a big hunk of rock he kept on his office wall. Hawaiian fertility symbol. Looks like a stone rolling pin to me. His memo pad says he had an appointment at 7:30 this morning with a T.H."

"Tommy Hagen!" Joyce gave a little gasp of amazement.

"Pop's been dead for twenty years," Keith grated. "You think he came back from the grave to protect the rights to his movie?"

An almost forgotten scrap of trivia ascended to Loren's consciousness. Hadn't the great comic's full name been Thomas Keith Hagen? Yes, he was sure it had. Then wasn't it quite likely that Tommy had given his own name to his adopted son? If Keith's full name was Thomas Keith Hagen, Jr., then his initials would match those on the memo pad in Cupples' office.

And since Keith's plane had landed at Kennedy Airport more than four hours before the murder, the young hothead had had plenty of opportunity to kill Cupples. Of course the initials on the memo pad could refer to Tommy Hagen Enterprises rather than to any person, or they might mean someone or something unconnected with the Hagen affairs. But at the moment Keith was clearly the prime suspect, and Loren wondered how long it would take Genetelli to recognize that fact.

After fifteen minutes of asking questions and scribbling in a

pocket notebook, the lieutenant allowed himself a frosty little smile as the pattern took shape. Another ten minutes and he snapped the notebook shut, thanked the three of them, and left.

As soon as Genetelli was out of the office Keith Hagen sprang to his feet and began to pace the shag carpet uncontrollably. "My God!" he shouted. "The fool thinks I did it!" His voice was a mixture of fury and fear.

Joyce Brook clutched Loren's arm in a grip of desperation. "What's going to happen now?"

"Nothing, for a while," he said. "They don't have enough of a case yet. They'll question all the employees and guests at your hotel, Mr. Hagen, trying to find someone who may have seen you slip out this morning in time to keep a certain 7:30 appointment. They'll check your home phone in L.A., the pay phone at the airport, the phones in your hotel, trying to prove you placed a call to Cupples and made that appointment. If they prove it, you're up to your neck. Did you kill him?"

"No, no, no! I swear I never laid eyes on the man. You're a lawyer, Mensing, you're supposed to be some kind of detective, help me for God's sake, will you?"

Loren turned back to Joyce and without saying anything she nodded. The look of concern on her face was one that Loren knew from years past. Whenever she saw anyone in trouble, no matter how richly deserved the trouble might be, her instinct was to do something about it.

"All right," he said. "Spring semester doesn't begin for ten days. I'll gamble with you. You'll pay my expenses, and you'll write a \$5,000 check to the City University Law School Student Aid Fund. Win, lose, or draw, you write those checks. And if I find you're lying to me, Hagen, I go to Genetelli and give him everything I learn. Remember, I'm not your lawyer, I'm not even licensed to practice law in New York, and nothing you tell me is privileged. Now the first thing you do is call Sheldon Rogers back and retain him to take care of your Section 24 problem."

"But doesn't Cupples' murder take care of that?" Joyce wondered.

"Not in the least. The rights he bought from Mrs. Middleton are now part of his estate. Cupples' will governs who takes the rights after his death, or the intestacy law-if he didn't leave a will. Rogers will have to find out who the legatees are and strike a deal with them. Probably the surrogate's court will have to approve the deal as long as the estate is in probate. Another thing, get Rogers to hire

an Oklahoma detective who can look into Mrs. Middleton's assignment of rights to Cupples. Maybe he can find some legal grounds for overturning the deal in court. Meanwhile I'm going to investigate a few angles here."

"Loren," Joyce said, "you're not licensed as a private detective. Can't you get in hot water for—"

He patted her hand. "Not the way I'm going to do it."

That afternoon he made a long-distance call to his home city. Bubbly-voiced Marcus Jaan Hooft, head of The Hooft Agency which occasionally did investigative work for him, gave Loren the name of a reliable New York detective.

At ten the next morning, the last day of the year, Loren climbed three flights of stairs in a shabby office building near Columbus Circle and knocked on the pebbled-glass door of *Madison Investigations*. Moses Madison was a small dandyish black man who kept three phones half buried in the clutter of papers on his ancient desk. From the calls that punctuated their discussion Loren gathered that most of Madison's investigative work was on contract to the city's legal-aid and public-defender offices. He seemed to delight in role-playing, talking like a Bedford-Stuyvesant street dude one minute and like a Rhodes scholar the next.

"Your theory is based on an assumption," he pointed out to Loren. "Namely, the Cupples murder is connected with the petty sabotage at Tommy Hagen Enterprises."

Loren shifted in his uncomfortable wooden chair. "With your help I hope to prove that assumption. That's why I want your operatives to comb every place in the metropolitan area that sells live worms. Let's see if we can't establish a sale to one of our suspects."

Madison ticked off their names on callused fingers. "Beau Douglas, Andy Lauer, Kathy Ellison. And you want a background report on each of them plus twenty-four-hour surveillance. It's going to cost you, Professor. But I know Tommy Hagen's son can pay my price." The detective crossed one purple-trousered ankle over the other on the edge of the venerable desk. "I still think you should add that receptionist to the list, Donna whatever her name is."

"Not necessary." Loren shook his head. "She's brand-new at the office and wasn't working there when the trouble started, and the girl whose place she took left to get married and is now living in Denver, so she's out of it too."

"But of course you do want reports on anyone who seems to have

a close association with any of the three suspects?"

"With one exception," Loren said. "Me. I'm going to be cultivating them myself over the next few days."

Madison's lips split in raucous laughter and he slapped his palms together. "Why, man, you don't think I'd bill you for a report on you!"

"The thought never sullied my mind," Loren said innocently.

The private detective's response was a mild obscenity, and they grinned at each other in mutual understanding.

"Hey, Prof," Madison asked as Loren was leaving, "you want a signal to call off my shadow in case you get lucky, uh, cultivating the Ellison chick?"

Loren spent New Year's Eve with Joyce Brook in her homey cluttered apartment in an East Village high-rise. They sipped eggnog spiked with chocolate liqueur and called back memories of old times and old loves as if that could exorcise the unacknowledged loneliness that each of them sensed in the other.

Late in the afternoon of the first day of 1975 Loren took a cab through empty slushy streets to the precinct station. For Lieutenant Genetelli this was not a holiday. Sitting in a scarred chair next to the lieutenant's gunmetal-gray desk, Loren summarized his work as deputy legal adviser and occasional detective without portfolio for his home city's police department. He was careful not to mention that at the moment he was more or less working for Genetelli's prime suspect in the Cupples murder. After a few long-distance phone calls the lieutenant was impressed enough to give Loren a status report on the case.

"We can't prove the contact," he growled. "Joyce Brook called Keith Hagen the afternoon before the killing, 3:23 P.M. New York time. That was the first Keith had ever heard of Orval Cupples. If he called Cupples to make that date for 7:30 the next morning, it had to be after 12:23 P.M. Pacific time and it had to be a long-distance call. Cupples' secretary swears the office got no long-distance calls at all that afternoon, at least not before five o'clock when she went home. Cupples stayed late. We know he got the call making the appointment while he was in the office because he made that note on the office memo pad, but so far we can't connect the call to Hagen."

"Any luck finding a witness who saw him leave his hotel around seven the morning of the murder?"

"Not yet," Genetelli grunted. "But we'll find one."

Loren said nothing that might suggest the existence of other suspects. The time for that, he thought, would come later.

Loren's headquarters the next day was Tommy Hagen Enterprises. He spent the morning in Andy Lauer's office at the top of the spiral stairs, belaboring the tall gawky products expert's patience with endless questions about the business of marketing Tommy's image. When Lauer seemed on the point of losing his temper, Loren reminded him that he was merely trying to save Lauer's employer from a murder charge. At twelve sharp, having learned nothing of value, he left by the ninth-floor exit door that served Lauer's office and went out for a coffee-shop lunch.

His target for the early afternoon was Beau Douglas. Making himself at home in Douglas' office along the eighth-floor inner hallway, Loren studied the form contracts that licensed theaters and film societies and television stations to exhibit Tommy Hagen movies, and asked several technical questions about the interpretation of certain clauses which the pedantic little Southerner was unable to answer.

At four o'clock he gave up to allow himself time for Kathy Ellison, who looked cool and tempting in a pink pants suit. In the hour before closing Loren learned that she had been working at Tommy Hagen Enterprises for eight months, that Joyce personally had hired her as assistant manager, and that both Lauer and Douglas had resented not having been promoted to the higher-paying position themselves.

At five Loren invited Kathy to join him for a cocktail and they sipped Scotch sours in a dimly lit lounge on Sixteenth; but after one drink Kathy excused herself—"Dinner date tonight," she smiled—and slid from the red leather booth. As she left the lounge a middle-aged man in a rumpled gray mackinaw took a last gulp of beer, set his stein on the bar, and headed for the door in her wake as if he'd forgotten an urgent appointment.

Late the next day Loren returned to Columbus Circle and the cluttered office of Moses Madison. The black detective picked out three manila folders from the debris of his desk top and handed them to Loren. A fourth folder he slid neatly between his vest and jacket.

"They ain't as much detail as they should be, but you know how it is, I got a license to keep and Equal Opportunity cats I got to

stroke, so I have to hire a certain number of incompetent white help."

Madison grinned with infinite self-delight as Loren dropped into a hard chair and skimmed the files.

Subject: Beauregard Douglas. Georgia born and bred, served two tours with the Marines in Vietnam, lived in a converted brownstone in the Bronx, used hashish on occasion.

Subject: Andrew Lauer. Master's degree in marketing, a girl friend in her third year at N.Y.U. Law School and another who worked in a Greek bellydance joint, expensive tastes in consumer goods and a habit of living beyond his means.

Subject: Kathleen Ellison. Presently having an affair with a married stockbroker, reputation for displaying a violent temper when she'd drunk too much.

In ten minutes of speed reading Loren absorbed enough information about three people's private lives to make him thoroughly disgusted with himself. On the other hand, these reports all but clinched the case, and that, he tried to convince himself, was what counted.

"You finished?" Moses Madison asked. When Loren nodded, the private detective removed the fourth folder from beneath his jacket and waved it tantalizingly just out of Loren's reach.

"This is a report one of my men gave me after he paid a visit to Chester's Bait and Tackle in Boonton, New Jersey. You want to try and dee-duce which one of them bought the worms?"

A grin spread slowly across Loren's face. He took off his glasses, polished them on his coatsleeve, and screwed up his features as if in agony of cerebration. Then he pronounced one of the three names and nonchalantly adjusted his glasses on his nose again.

Madison slapped his palms together in appreciation. "Good shot!" he chuckled. "Give the professor a see-gar."

"Make it a Montecruz," Loren said as he reached for the fourth folder.

That evening he paid a return visit to Genetelli's cubicle at the police station. After talking for more than an hour he finally persuaded the dubious lieutenant to do two things: Genetelli agreed to have the suspect's neighborhood canvassed in search of someone who might have seen the suspect leave early the morning of the murder, and to have a fingerprint man dust the suspect's office at Tommy Hagen Enterprises in search of the fingerprints of Orval Cupples.

By noon the next day both a witness and the prints had been found, and the arrest had been made.

Joyce Brook crushed another barely smoked cigarette into the overflowing tray on her desk. Loren saw that behind her quiet rage she was close to tears. He doubted that she was following his explanation. The truth had hit her too hard.

"My assumption was that the acts of sabotage here were connected with the murder. The 'T.H.' memo on Cupples' desk pad pointed in that direction, of course, but we couldn't consider the memo absolute proof.

"As you described the sabotage to me, it included things like the deliberate misplacing of files and the cancellation of important appointments with fake phone calls. That kind of dirty trick suggested a trickster who had detailed knowledge of your operations and access to your office. In short, *a trickster who worked here*.

"And then Orval Cupples enters the picture, a cheap talent agent with no legal background and no lawyer associates, who just happened to have grasped a subtle point about Section 24 of the Copyright Act and bought the rights which tied up the most valuable *Tommy Hagen* movie. Assuming that he was working as an agent for our trickster, where did he get his legal knowledge? Answer: in one way or another, from the trickster.

"So our trickster works here, and knows a lot of law or has access to such knowledge. Was it Beau Douglas? Kathy Ellison? Andy Lauer? None of them is a lawyer.

"Almost from the start I had a clue as to which of them it was. Not mathematical proof, but a clue. On my first visit here, when I got out of the elevator at the eighth floor, it happened that Cupples was just leaving after making his demands on you, and bumped into me as he got into the cage I'd just left. Now I didn't realize this until you mentioned it later, but the self-service elevators in this building are a lot newer than the building itself. They're the type that have to go all the way to the top floor before they can come down again.

"What does that mean? It means that when Cupples stepped into that car, he wasn't going down. *He was going up*.

"Does any of our suspects work above the eighth floor of this building? Yes, just one. Andy Lauer, whose office has its own private entrance and exit onto the ninth-floor hallway, which I used when I went out to lunch two days ago. In addition, he has a girl friend in law school, and she happens to have taken a copyright course last

spring, as I verified this morning. And, as Madison's report proves, it was Lauer who bought the worms that were dumped into your desk.

"After meeting with you, Cupples must have gone upstairs to report to Lauer. I think he must also have demanded a lot more money than Lauer was paying him to act as front man. Later in the afternoon Lauer called Cupples' office and made that appointment for 7:30 the next morning. They had a fight over the division of the money you were going to pay Cupples, and Lauer killed him. Lauer was living way over his income and needed every cent for himself."

"He didn't do all this just for the money," Joyce said. She seemed calmer now but Loren was afraid it might be the calm before an explosion; because her remark told him that she knew what lay behind the sabotage.

"No, not just for the money," he said, choosing his words judiciously. "He was angry when you—well, when you hired a woman as assistant manager instead of promoting him. I think he hoped to make such a mess here that you'd either quit or be fired. He figured Keith would give him your job, and he also saw the chance to make a nice piece of change on the side out of the Cupples deal. Now he's under arrest, Keith's off the hook on the murder charge, Sheldon Rogers thinks he can prove Cupples made misrepresentations to Mrs. Middleton which will get her assignment to him invalidated in court, and you won't find any more worms crawling over your letterheads." He couldn't look directly into the moistness of her eyes. "Happy endings all around, right? So why are you so glum?"

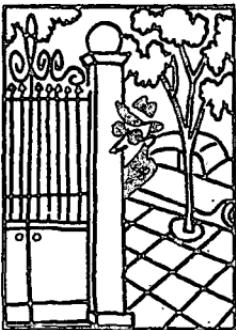
"Damn all men to hell!" she burst out. "All of them!" And she buried her face in her hands and wept.

When she spoke again it was without raising her eyes to him. "Could you—just do me a favor and let me alone for a while, will you, Loren?"

Loren wanted desperately to say the right words to her but he knew that there were no right words to say. "Sure," he muttered. "See you next time I'm in town." He let himself silently out of the office and took the elevator down eight flights to the slushy street and cabbed back to his hotel to pack his bags and get out of New York. In a week or so, he thought, he'd give her a call.

(AUTHOR'S NOTE)

In 1977, two years after this story first appeared in EQMM, the U. S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit reversed the lower court decision in the case involving the old Rudolph Valentino film on which the legal aspects of the story were based. And under the new Copyright Act, which took effect at the beginning of 1978, it is impossible for the public availability of a movie to be frustrated as the corpse in "The Kumquats Affair" tried to do. Any readers who might wish to learn more about the legal problem treated in the story are referred to my article "Rx for Copyright Death," *Washington University Law Quarterly*, Fall 1977.



Ellery Queen

The Adventure of the Honest Swindler

Once again Ellery is tested at The Puzzle Club . . .

Detective: ELLERY QUEEN

"Who leads off this evening?" asked Ellery. It was his turn to crack the mystery.

"My *gambit*." Syres was the Founder of The Puzzle Club. The regular meetings took place in his Park Avenue penthouse, and his chef's *cordon bleu* dinners were never served until the challenged member had either triumphed or failed. So a hungry Ellery took the inquisitional armchair facing four of his five co-members—the fifth, Arkavy the Nobel biochemist, was in Glasgow attending one of his interfering symposiums—and was fortifying himself from the steam tray of Charlot's canapé works of art.

"The villain of tonight's Puzzle," began the multimillionaire who had made his oily pile in the Southwest, "is an old scamp, one of those legendary prospectors the West used to brag could live for months on beans and jerky in temperatures that would frazzle an ordinary man's gizzard or turn his blood to mush-ice."

"Old Pete's life," Darnell, the criminal lawyer, took up the tale, "has been one uninterrupted washout. Although he's tracked a hundred El Dorado-type rumors thousands of miles in his time, he's never once made the big strike. Only an occasional miserable stake scratched out of hardpan has kept Pete alive. Doctor?"

The psychiatrist, Vreeland, tapped the ash surgically off his two-dollar cigar. "Finally the mangy old fox becomes desperate. Frustration, loneliness, advancing years have whittled his wits to a fine edge; he plots a cunning—no, why plagiarize the shrinking violet? a brilliant!—scheme. To carry it off he sells just about everything in the world he owns. It brings him enough to pay for a display ad in *The Wall Street Journal*."

"*The Wall Street Journal?*" Ellery helped himself to the Scotch, looking delighted. "What imagination, what panache! Exactly how does your villain word his ad, by the way?"

Little Emmy Wandermere, who had just won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry, offered him a sheet of paper. On it she had penciled in her swashy hand:

Finance My Uranium Hunt!
Impossible to Lose!!
5-Year Money-Back Guarantee!
Complete Refund
Even If Uranium
Is Never Found!
Old Prospector, Box 1313

"Hardly a *Wall Street Journal*-type ad," Ellery said. "I'll put it down to poet's license, Miss Wandermere. And the response to Pete's pitch?"

"Heavy," the oil tycoon said. "You know what I always say—a sure thing gathers no moss. The dough comes rolling in."

"Can you give me a figure, Mr. Syres?"

"Well, let's say five hundred suckers invest \$100 each to stake the old skunk for five years. That's \$50,000. Agreeable, Miss Wandermere, gentlemen?"

The poet, the lawyer, and the psychiatrist nodded solemnly.

"In short, Mr. Queen," Dr. Vreeland said, "if Pete should strike uranium, the investors can realize many times their investments—"

"Would you believe like five thousand percent on their money?" winked the oil man.

"But even if he should fail," Lawyer Darnell chipped in, "every last investor at least gets back his original investment. That was Pete's offer."

"Do you mean that if I'd staked Pete to \$100 of my money and he didn't find uranium, he'd give me my hundred back?"

"Your money, and that of every other investor."

Ellery meditated. The company waited. Finally Ellery said, "Did the old fellow find uranium, or didn't he?"

"If I may embroider the obvious, gentlemen?" The lady-poet's wicked blue eyes took on a faraway look. "Prospector Pete, better provisioned and outfitted than he's ever been outside his most beautiful dreams, sets out on his uranium quest. With the euphoria of

his breed he spends years—in the deserts, the plains, the mountains, the glaciers, from Baja, California, to the Rockies to Alaska and all stops between—patient years of foot-slogging, climbing, chipping, digging, panning, or whatever it is you do when you're looking for uranium. The sun fries him, the rain waterlogs him, snow and ice make a Father Frost out of him. Many times he nearly dies of thirst. He runs the risks of bear and cougar and, worst of all, of loneliness. It does seem as if he deserves a happy ending, Mr. Queen, but he doesn't get it. He finds absolutely nothing. Not a squawk or a wiggle in his Geiger counter. Until finally the time limit in his guarantee is up and he hasn't a cent left."

"Whereupon," Syres said, "old Pete makes good the promise in his ad."

To which Darnell added, with magnificent simplicity, "End of story."

There was a tranquil hush.

"Well," Ellery muttered. "I see. His money's gone, he's failed to find uranium, and still he manages to pay back every one of his backers. In full?"

"In full."

"Then and there? Not ten years later?"

"Within twenty-four hours," Dr. Vreeland said. "Question: How does Pete do it?"

"I suppose I had better rule out the obvious. He hadn't found something else of value? Gold, say? Diamonds? Platinum?"

Emmy Wandermere looked sad. "Alas, as they used to say, Mr. Queen. He found nothing."

"Or just before the five years were up, his long-lost uncle—on his mother's side, of course—died in Poona, Illinois, and left him ten billion lakhs?"

"Please," Lawyer Darnell said, pained. "Our man Pete is penniless when he runs the ad, his prospecting efforts produce an unrelieved zero, he doesn't have an uncle, and at the expiration of the five years he can't claim a single negotiable asset. His equipment is worn out and not worth the match to set it on fire, and even his burro has died of exhaustion."

"Yet every investor gets his money back *in toto*."

"Every investor, every dollar."

"Hm," Ellery said, reaching for the Scotch again.

"You have the usual one hour, Queen," Syres said briskly. "After that, as you know, Charlot's dinner—"

"Yes, won't be edible, and I'm declared Nitwit of the Month." Ellery took an elegant swallow. "To avert both disasters I'd better solve your puzzle right now."

"How did old Pete manage to repay the entire \$50,000 after five years in spite of his failure to find anything of value and winding up dead-broke?"

"The answer has to be," Ellery said gently, "that *he never touched the \$50,000 in the first place*. Didn't spend a dime of it. So when the time limit expired he was naturally able to give the whole sum back.

"But if he never touched the principal, how did he manage to finance five years of prospecting?

"Simplest way in the world," Ellery went on. "When he first collected the \$50,000 from his backers, he deposited the entire amount in a savings bank. At, say, five percent interest the \$50,000 would bring him an income of \$2500 a year. \$2500 a year was a sumptuous grubstake to a desert rat with one ancient burro to his name and a lifetime's practise in living on next to nothing.

"Old Pete was no swindler, and he certainly wasn't the scoundrel you deliberately painted him to set me off the track. He was simply a businessman following time-honored business practice. And now, fellow-puzzlers, shall we partake of Charlot's goodies?" Ellery flourished his empty glass. "I'm ready to eat Pete's burro."



Phyllis Bentley

Miss Phipps Discovers America

Miss Phipps combines pleasure with business on her first visit to the United States—and, in the classical tradition, meets murder wherever she goes...

Detective: MISS MARIAN PHIPPS

66 **W**hat first put you on to me?" asked the murderer. "It was a matter of literary history," said Miss Phipps. She explained.

"I get your point, and I'm sorry," began the murderer, "because as it is—"

"That's the trouble, you see," said Miss Phipps sorrowfully, shaking her head. "One murder so often leads to another. I felt some sympathy for you about the first. I must warn you that I'm wearing a life-jacket," she added hastily.

"That won't help you any after a hard crack on the head with this paddle."

"A dangerous drifting log? I see. But my body will float."

"Not after my well-meant but futile attempts at rescue."

Miss Phipps plucked a whistle from her capacious bosom and blew three loud blasts . . .

On Wednesday morning Miss Phipps had wakened with a start. Whether it was the reflection of the lake water moving in silvery ripples across the bedroom ceiling, or whether it was some sound which had broken her slumber, Miss Phipps was not sure.

Her sleep had been heavy, for she had flown from London to New York the night before, then traveled by another plane, a car, and at last her host's new speedboat, to join her friends, the Stones, in their summer camp in the Adirondacks.

Waldo Stone—short, dark, square, hairy, and friendly—the editor

of one of those glossy American magazines which pay such delightfully fabulous sums for serials and short stories, and his small blonde wife Louella, who wrote some of the stories, had been friends of Miss Phipps's ever since a tale of hers had first appeared in Waldo's "book." When Waldo and Louella had married a few years ago, after previous matrimonial misadventures, Miss Phipps had rejoiced greatly.

Now some kind of mixup had arisen about her new serial for Waldo and its television rights, and Louella had cabled her: WHY NOT COME OVER AND TAKE CARE OF IT AND PLAY ON OUR LAKE—and here she was. So far the Adirondack scenery was all that had been claimed for it. The mountains, the lakes, the huge pines, the chalk-white birches, the graceful spruce . . . Miss Phipps slipped out of bed, put on her spectacles, and went to the window.

The landscape visible from the Stones' handsome "camp"—this was the proper word, Miss Phipps had discovered, though she tended to think of these lakeside summer houses as wooden chalets—had been lovely in hot sunshine yesterday afternoon, when the lake waters were deep blue and the unbroken slopes of surrounding trees deep green; it had been lovely last night when a moonlight path lay across the black lake; it was lovely again now, in still another different guise.

The hour was very early, not quite full dawn, and as Miss Phipps watched a gleam of sun cut a narrow swathe of light across the lake through one of the stretches which divided the Erwins' pine-covered island from the mainland; wreaths of mist still swirled and brooded over the calm silver water. The Stones' wooden boat-dock lay full in this ray of light, but dark patches of moisture—footprints pointing to the shore—still remained on it here and there, undried.

Even as Miss Phipps gazed, however, the mist curled in on itself and gracefully withdrew. Across the water, to the left, on the point of their long private island, the Erwins' smartly painted white camp gleamed in the sunshine. Then suddenly the green of the trees brightened, and the lake water took on a delicate tinge of blue.

"Heavenly!" exclaimed Miss Phipps.

She slid back into bed and fell asleep.

It seemed only a moment—though in reality it was some three hours—before she was wakened again, this time by shouts of "Phippsy!"—for this was the name by which she went in the Stone household. "Coming for a swim, Phippsy?" called Louella, putting her head round the bedroom door.

With some reluctance Miss Phipps heaved herself from the warm bed, squeezed her curves into a sea-blue swim suit, and went down to the boat dock, where Louella (in smart white) and Waldo (in scanty red) were already waiting.

"Hurry up, Randall!" cried Louella to the young man who, in a dark blue bathing suit sporting the white insignia of an athletic club, was neater than Miss Phipps had expected from his tousled appearance the night before. The young man was coming through the trees.

"Don't wait for me!" he called out.

There was more urgency in his tone than the occasion seemed to require, and Miss Phipps looked at him with some interest as he approached. He was tall, dark, and very thin, with a haggard aquiline face, a mass of tumbled black hair, and brilliant brown eyes. It had emerged last night that Waldo regarded him as one of the new young poets of whom America might hope one day to be very proud.

Louella had known Randall's mother at school, so they were both glad to invite him up to the camp for a month and had bedded him in one of their outlying cabins where he could be alone and work to his heart's content. He had felt like working last night soon after Miss Phipps's arrival—so that she had been able to settle the serial and television matter with Waldo at her ease, and had seen little of her fellow guest.

Now as he scrambled down the uneven bank she perceived that Martin Randall limped, and she remembered that Waldo had told her of the childhood riding accident which had crushed the bones of his left foot.

At this point Waldo, looking owlish without his glasses, splashed into the lake in a flat but vigorous dive. Louella lowered herself carefully down the vertical ladder from the dock into the lake, gave a girlish scream at the water's low temperature, and then floundered off in a somewhat spasmodic breast stroke. Miss Phipps followed with a similar scream and stroke, for the water was cold and deep. Randall, she observed, came down the ladder too; possibly his leg injury made it difficult for him to dive.

The day's program proved entirely delightful. After a quick dip, they sipped hot coffee beside a crackling log fire, ate an ample breakfast, dressed at their leisure, then began to make plans. Waldo and Louella decided to invite their lakeside friends for cocktails the next afternoon.

As they had no telephone, the invitations must be given in person, and the quickest route was not by the distant and winding road, but by water.

Louella and her two guests went down to the boathouse and stood around while Waldo discussed which of the families who had camps around the lake were in residence with Ben Hunter, the guide employed by Waldo. With his lean height, long curly gray hair and beard, and rather impish blue eyes, he appeared to Miss Phipps the image of James Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo in old age, and she listened to his calm ironic drawl with much enjoyment.

"Are the Erwins in, Ben?" inquired Louella.

"I wouldn't know anything about the Erwins, Mrs. Stone," said Ben. "But I've heard they came two days ago."

"Their flag isn't up," objected Waldo.

A gleam of amusement crossed Ben's blue eyes.

"I did hear as how Mr. Erwin was rather mad about that, Mr. Stone. Seems his flagstaff broke in a blow last winter. He ordered a new one from town, but they haven't delivered it yet. Seems he didn't pay his last bill there in full. Had an argument about an item, or something."

Miss Phipps gave a sympathetic murmur.

"Don't waste any sympathy on John Clayton Erwin, the third, Phippsy," said Louella tartly. "He's a rich playboy who never did a stroke of work in his life. Isn't that so, Ben?"

"I never heard of his working any," drawled Ben. "Course, my testimony ain't impartial, ma'am," he added, turning to Miss Phipps.

"Ben worked for the Erwins at one time," explained Louella. "But they didn't see eye to eye on various matters, did you, Ben?"

"It was chiefly deer, Mrs. Stone," murmured Ben.

"Clay shot more deer than his license entitled him to," said Louella. "He was fined heavily and his license revoked—after Ben left him."

Ben gazed across the lake—possibly, thought Miss Phipps, to hide the spark of satisfaction which brightened his elderly eyes. "He's not what you'd call a good shot, Mrs. Stone," he murmured.

"We shall have to ask the Erwins all the same, Louella," said Waldo testily.

"That might spoil the party for your other guests, Mr. Stone," said Ben. "Professor Firbaum and those young Normans, it seems they don't feel very neighborly to Mr. Erwin."

"Why not?"

"I couldn't say, I'm sure," said Ben. "Will that be all, Mr. Stone?"

"Yes, Ben," said Waldo.

"He's a native of these parts and knows everything about everyone," Waldo added to Miss Phipps as Ben disappeared among the trees.

"So I gathered," said Miss Phipps.

A considerable discussion followed as to who should fetch the mail, who should give the invitations, and which boats should be used for these errands. It seemed that Waldo and Louella were both proficient paddlers, and Randall a promising pupil; Miss Phipps declined to attempt a paddle, but was eager to ride in a canoe. So one was drawn down from its rack and launched by Waldo with some noise and splash, but then rejected by Louella as too slow.

Miss Phipps was content to listen idly to the talk, lounging in the now blazing sunshine, and gazing out over the rippling blue lake. From time to time a boat or two passed in the distance; in the mountain peace every sound carried far and accurately across the water.

All at once a loud bang nearby caused Miss Phipps to jump in alarm.

"A squirrel, Mr. Stone," said Ben, appearing with a long gun in one hand and a limp gray form in the other.

"Good," said Waldo.

"Why do you shoot squirrels?" asked Miss Phipps, her voice full of distaste.

"They eat the birds' eggs, ma'am," said Ben, disappearing again among the trees.

Miss Phipps sighed. She was familiar with the anomaly by which some people adored horses and dogs but hunted foxes; to love deer and birds and hate squirrels was part of the same perplexing paradox. But then all life was perplexing, mused Miss Phipps, since all animals, in order to sustain life, must destroy other life. Man, however, had imposed laws on this ruthless scheme—at least, to some extent.

"Dreaming up a plot, Phippsy?" shouted Waldo in her ear. "Your royal barge awaits you."

They all climbed into the speedboat and roared off down the lake.

Miss Phipps studied the customs of the lake with great interest. One slowed the speedboat when approaching canoes or persons fishing. One shouted, "Hi, there!" or waved, to every boat or person one

passed. It was permissible to blow a whistle to attract attention, and Waldo explained, without demonstrating, the arrangement of long and short blasts which meant a call for help.

They swerved, turning toward the Erwins' handsome boathouse.

"Clay and Virgie are there—I see them," said Waldo.

"V рі gіe's wеагіng a hаt and a tоwn suit. They mυst be gоіng sоmеwhеrе. Pеrhaps they wоn't be able to cоmе for cоcktails," said Louella—it seemed to Miss Phipps that she spoke with relief.

"Erwin isn't wеагіng tоwn clothes," observed Randall.

The contrast between the dress of the Erwin pair was certainly marked. Clayton was wearing the typical lake uniform of shorts and a T-shirt—of the very finest quality, Miss Phipps observed—while Virginia had a suit of gray corded silk and a little hat to match which, though of the most expensive simplicity, certainly belonged to town.

The Stone speedboat drew up jerkily alongside the dock, for dear Waldo was not the most expert of navigators, thought Miss Phipps; he had not been born to inherited wealth, but had achieved a lake camp recently, the hard way. Miss Phipps saw a look of contempt cross the fair, well-chiseled features of the handsome young Clayton Erwin, and she disliked him on sight.

"Hi, Clay! Hi, Virgie!" cried Waldo, beaming.

"Hi, Waldo," replied Erwin. The deliberate calm and level cadence of these two words had an effect of mockery, and Miss Phipps disliked him even more.

"We came to ask you up for cocktails tomorrow," said Waldo.

"Virginia can't. Her father's ill again," said Erwin.

His slight emphasis on *again* indicated that in his view the health of his wife's father was an unmitigated bore.

"We're just off to see if I can get a seat on the afternoon plane," said Virginia.

Miss Phipps heard in her voice that she was anxious to leave at once. But to show her anxiety to her husband is a mistake, she thought.

Sure enough, Erwin said promptly, "Oh, there's plenty of time. Come up and have a drink, Waldo—Louella. Oh—and you, Randall." His glance raked Miss Phipps, who had never felt plumper and plainer in her life. The introduction was effected. "I'm afraid I haven't read any of your books," said Erwin with a cold smile.

"I don't believe we've time, Clayton," said Louella, with a glance to Miss Phipps to call ~~her attention to Virginia~~ Virginia's unease.

"Oh, come, Louella!" urged Erwin. "Virgie will think she's been inhospitable if you don't stay a while."

The speedboat party disembarked and trailed unhappily up the rocky woodland path to the white camp. Miss Phipps took it slowly for Randall's sake, and Virginia hung back with Miss Phipps.

"Clayton won't have a telephone when he's on vacation, you see," explained Virginia. "We received the telegram about father's illness only yesterday afternoon when we fetched the mail. It was no use trying for a place on the morning plane, Clay thought."

Her voice was wistful. Poor child, thought Miss Phipps, she's a sweet, simple person—she really believes she's been inhospitable. She believes all her husband's gibes. She's desperately unhappy. And very beautiful, added Miss Phipps, surveying the wings of dark hair, the lovely gray eyes, the clear fine skin, the delicate profile.

"As a matter of fact," lied Miss Phipps in a loud cheerful voice so as to be overheard by the three in front, "we really mustn't stay long. Both Mr. Randall and myself have manuscripts which must be posted in time to catch the plane. Isn't that so, Mr. Randall?"

"It certainly is," lied the poet promptly.

A faint color tinged Virginia's cheek. She turned. "Hi, Martin," she said.

"Virginia and I are old schoolmates," said Randall quickly. "She and I and Louella come from the same home town."

Oh, lord, he's in love with her and the riding accident was in some way her fault and he was too proud to take advantage of it and she feels guilty, diagnosed Miss Phipps rapidly.

"The Stones' camp used to be my father's, you see," said Virginia. "Waldo and Louella bought it after—"

"Virginia!" called her husband imperiously.

Virginia hurried meekly ahead.

Louella and Miss Phipps sat on a log outside the neat little white wooden building, in a grassy clearing framed by pines, which to Miss Phipps's delight had proved to be the nearest U.S. Post Office. Randall, who did not relish the mile walk from the foot of the lake down the road, had remained in the speedboat, and Waldo was inside the Post Office. A huge salmon-pink car flashed by; Virginia Erwin waved, her husband lifted a disdainful finger, in greeting.

"Horrid man!" exclaimed Miss Phipps with emphasis.

"You don't have to tell me," agreed Louella.

"Possessive. Wants his wife at his beck and call every moment.

I wonder he allows her to go home alone," said Miss Phipps.

"That's how he holds her. They've no children. Through her father's comfort, I mean. Her mother died some time ago. Her father took a financial tumble, and Clayton rescued him—more or less."

"Less rather than more, I should think. Keeps both of them on the end of a chain. Emotional blackmail, I'd call it. Don't let him blackmail you, Louella."

"What makes you think he does?" said Louella quickly, flushing.

"Oh, just a vague indication here and there—it's surprising what an intonation or pause can suggest . . ."

"Waldo has always said how keen your observation is, Phippsy," said Louella drily. She hesitated. "It's really too absurd," she said. "After all, I'm almost old enough to be Clayton's mother."

"But still handsome, Louella," murmured Miss Phipps, glancing admiringly at the charming petite figure and thick blonde curls.

"It was a party at our camp. I was getting some more liquor from the closet, when Clayton came up behind me and kissed my neck."

"But did that matter so much?" marveled Miss Phipps. "Everyone kisses and calls darling nowadays."

"No, of course it didn't matter," said Louella angrily. "I disliked it because I dislike Clayton Erwin, but I never thought of it again until he began hinting about it, referring to the incident as if it were something important between us."

"Ah, I see," said Miss Phipps thoughtfully. "You didn't tell Waldo."

"Why on earth should I? It wasn't worth telling."

"But with the lapse of time and these continual hints—"

"Waldo," said Louella, busily lighting a cigarette, "in spite of his editorial airs, is basically not very self-confident. He always tends to think of himself as poor and plain."

"Louella," said Miss Phipps earnestly, "tell Waldo tonight."

"No, I won't!" said Louella. "It's too late."

"You're running a foolish and unnecessary risk, Louella."

"On your way, girls," cried Waldo, emerging from the Post Office with a handful of mail. "We've three invitations to deliver before lunch."

The speedboat swerved, straightened, ceased to roar, and drew up rather neatly beside the boat dock of Colonel Merriam, retired. Waldo climbed out and Randall quickly followed.

Instantly pandemonium reigned. Six small children, clad in six life preservers of varied colors, mingled with six golden retrievers, rushed out on the dock. Waldo and Randall almost disappeared in

a confusion of yapping and barking, of screaming and laughing, of a flourishing of tails and paws, a waving of small bare arms and a tossing of curly heads.

Suddenly a voice from above boomed out a word of command, unrecognizable by Miss Phipps, but completely efficacious, for the noise ceased at once. Louella and Miss Phipps, somewhat impeded by several friendly dogs who wished to lick their faces, were at length hauled out of the boat and followed Waldo up the path to the camp, Randall trailing behind. The Colonel, tall, broad, gray-haired, neat in slacks and shirt of becomingly pale khaki, met them halfway. Miss Phipps and Randall were introduced.

"Grandchildren," said the Colonel, indicating them with a wave of the hand. "Come for a month. My sons won't be here again till the week-end and my daughters-in-law have gone marketing with my wife. So I'm in charge. Always put 'em all into life preservers right away—safer, you know. Only two of these dogs are mine, but my sons have two each. Boo-ya!" he shouted—or at least it sounded like that to Miss Phipps.

The dogs and children sat down at once, and Miss Phipps marveled at the similarity of Colonels of all nations. Drinks began to be administered and invitations issued.

"Glad you've dropped by, Waldo," said the Colonel seriously. "Here's Fritz and Ruth come with an awkward problem. Professor and Mrs. Firbaum, Miss Phipps—lake neighbors."

Professor Firbaum (white-haired, fresh-complexioned, probably a Hitler refugee) and his wife (university lecturer, younger, with a spark in the brown eyes behind her spectacles) reminded Miss Phipps strongly of Professor Baer and Jo March in that childhood classic of Louisa Alcott's, *Little Women Wedded*. As these two characters had always been favorites of Miss Phipps's—indeed, the youthful literary efforts of Jo had helped to confirm Miss Phipps's own ambitions—she listened with great sympathy to their account of their troubles.

The details were somewhat too dependent on local topography for Miss Phipps to grasp completely, but she understood the general problem well enough. Clayton Erwin wished to "buy in" part of the Firbaums' land, which faced his own on the mainland on the opposite side of the lake from the Stones—to protect his view, Erwin said. The Firbaums did not wish to sell any of their small holdings. Erwin therefore was causing trouble by throwing doubt on their title to their land. Surveyors had been summoned, and lawyers called in.

"But why protect his view? We do not threaten his view. Our camp can scarcely be seen from his windows. We do not even go often on the lake in a boat. We are not good with the boat," explained the Professor, turning to Miss Phipps.

It occurred to Miss Phipps, and she could see that the thought was present in the minds of the others, that the explosions and roarings involved in the inefficient starting and conduct of an outboard motor boat might well disturb a neighboring island's peace. But what arrogant selfishness on Clayton Erwin's part—to be unable to tolerate an infrequent noise! Just like him, however, thought Miss Phipps.

"Fellow's a damned little dictator," boomed the Colonel. "Thinks he rules the earth because he owns a few bonds. Like to have him under my orders for a day or two. Why don't you and I go into town with Fritz, Waldo, and tell the surveyors' office a few things, hey?"

"Be glad to," said Waldo. "All the same it would be better to tackle Clayton privately and try to get him to call it off. Bound to cost Fritz a lot of money if he has to go to court to establish his title."

"I certainly wish I hadn't asked the Erwins for tomorrow," said Louella in distress.

"Might be a good opportunity—I might say a few words to him on Fritz's behalf," said the Colonel, a gleam of battle in his eye.

"He might turn nasty," objected Louella.

"Wouldn't frighten me," boomed the Colonel with obvious enjoyment.

It was agreed to await the result of the Colonel's "few words" before taking any public action.

"We must go—it's late—we still have to call on the Normans," said Louella.

The Normans' camp pleased Miss Phipps greatly, because it was so neat and so obviously homemade. The small house looked exactly like the illustration of the log cabin in the book *From Log Cabin to White House* which Miss Phipps had enjoyed in her teens. A small patch of grass in front was green and well kept. The boat dock, where a canoe and an outboard motorboat were tied up, was clean and new. What Miss Phipps called a nice normal young man, American married-postwar type, was sawing a log by hand on a sawhorse, watched by a healthy-looking ten-year-old boy.

"Hi, Les!" called Waldo.

"Hi, Waldo," replied Leslie Norman. "Come on in."

He put down the saw carefully and came toward the dock. Miss

Phipps noted that his tone, though friendly, seemed subdued. Waldo and Louella evidently noted it too, for they spoke together, with the same intent.

"Sorry—no time," said Waldo. "Just dropped by to ask you and Fran to come in for a drink tomorrow about five."

"Is anything wrong, Les? Where's Frances?" said Louella.

"You haven't heard, then? Tom and Ed here were nearly drowned yesterday morning. Canoe overturned."

The four in the speedboat exclaimed their concern.

"Sure were. 'Course they can both swim, and I went after them pretty quick when Ed blew his whistle—he kept his head and blew it fast, I'll say that for him," said Ed's father, ruffling his son's already tangled hair with a proud hand. "But Tom being younger got a bit of a fright, and he isn't feeling so good this morning. So Fran's kept him in bed and she's staying near him."

"Very wise," said Miss Phipps.

Leslie seemed to find this sympathy agreeable, for he relaxed and said, "But come on in," in a more energetic tone.

"But how did it happen, Les?" said Waldo. "I thought your kids were too well trained on the water to turn over a canoe."

"It was that blasted Clayton Erwin!" growled Leslie, suddenly crimson. "He came past the kids in his speedboat, far too close and far too fast, and naturally the waves of his boat's wake upset their canoe. Of course," said Leslie, swallowing and clearly making a great effort to be fair, "I don't say he saw it happen. He'd be round the point before the wake reached them. But all the same, I'd like to tell Mr. John Clayton Erwin the third just what I think of him."

"You ought to report it to Colonel Merriam as chairman of the Lake Association," suggested Louella.

"Yes, that's the thing to do," urged Waldo. "It was a clear violation of our lake-navigation laws."

"Well," said Leslie doubtfully, "that's what Fran says. But for myself, I'd rather take a poke at that arrogant, condescending—"

"No sense in putting yourself in the wrong, Les," warned Waldo. "Frankly, as an up-and-coming young architect in this neighborhood, you can't afford to make enemies."

"And think of Fran," urged Louella.

"Come round tomorrow and we'll talk it over," said Waldo. "Bring the kids, of course. 'Bye, now!'

"Bye now," echoed the young father.

As their boat left the shore Miss Phipps observed that Norman

stood looking after them for some time.

"Just tell me, Waldo Stone, what we shall do with Clayton Erwin if he turns up at five tomorrow evening," said Louella.

"We'll turn him over to Phippy," said Waldo, grinning.

Miss Phipps groaned . . .

A swim, a nap, and a short stroll through the woods filled the afternoon very pleasantly.

"*This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the hemlocks,*" quoted Miss Phipps, gazing up at the towering trees.

"Longfellow!" snorted Randall with derision, while Waldo murmured deprecatingly that the trees were not in fact primeval, but second or third growth.

"Why jeer at Longfellow?" said Miss Phipps. She knew several answers to her question, but wanted to make the young man talk. "Arnold Bennett called him the chief minor poet of the English language."

"What did he know about poetry?" scoffed Randall.

"What do you think of modern English poetry, Mr. Randall?"

"There haven't been any English poets worth mentioning since Shelley and Keats," said Randall, his eyes sparkling as he threw out this challenge.

"Wouldn't you include Lord Byron?"

Randall muttered something that Miss Phipps could not make out. The young man was obviously annoyed.

"Tell me about modern American poetry," said Miss Phipps encouragingly.

At first sulky, Randall presently recovered his spirits and talked enthusiastically.

But the best part of the day proved to be the evening, when in two canoes—Louella and Randall in one, Waldo and Miss Phipps in the other—the party set off to the remoter stretches of the lake in search of deer. The canoes glided silently through the calm water in which the huge trees were mirrored with astonishing exactness; in the twilight hush came a sudden *swish-swish* noise, and a red deer bounded suddenly away into a thicket.

The purpose of the excursion being thus achieved, the canoes turned homeward. They had quite a long way to go, and the moon was silvering the black water before they rounded a point of land and saw the lights of the Stones' camp in the distance.

"This is the Erwins' island," said Miss Phipps, proud of the local

knowledge she had acquired in only one day. "Oh, no, it can't be," she added, disappointed. "There are *two* lighted houses."

"It's the Erwins' all right," said Waldo. "The other building is where their butler and cook live. In the old days when Clay's father was alive, they had scads of guests and scads of servants, four or five big guest cabins and huge servants' quarters. Even Erwin can't do that nowadays—he just has a married couple. They've a lot of cabins still on the island, though."

"Don't talk to me about that young man," said Miss Phipps. "He spoils the view."

On Thursday morning Miss Phipps woke late and happy, feeling that she had her new environment well in hand. She was now well acquainted with canoes, speedboats, inboard and outboard motors, boat docks, squirrels, deer, gunshots, beaver, chipmunks, trees, drifting logs, guides, camps, and navigation laws. The day began with the agreeable routine which now seemed familiar. After breakfast Randall decided to work and retired to his cabin; Louella entered into consultation with her elderly housekeeper; Waldo and Miss Phipps were sent down the lake to the nearest small town, to fetch additional liquor for the party.

"That's Les Norman ahead with our local doctor," said Waldo. He put on speed and overtook the Norman outboard, in which an elderly man in more formal clothes than those usually worn by the lake dwellers was sitting rather stiffly. "Hi there, Les! Isn't young Tom feeling well this morning?"

"He's had a very restless night—so Fran wanted the doctor here to have a look at him," said Leslie.

"He has been in shock, and has a cold," said the doctor in a professional tone. "But all he needs is slight sedation and the comfort of his mother's presence. Nothing seriously wrong."

"Glad to hear that," said Waldo, roaring away.

On their way back from town Waldo and Miss Phipps called at the little Post Office to collect the mail.

"I was just wondering, Mr. Stone," said the neat young postmistress, "if you would be so kind as to deliver a telegram to Mr. Erwin. He hasn't been in this morning . . . and . . . as it *is* a telegram . . . it might be important."

She blushed; it was clear that, of course, the contents of the telegram were known to her.

"I'll be glad to," said Waldo.

"I suppose Virginia's father has died," said Miss Phipps.

"I guess so. Clay will need to catch the afternoon plane," said Waldo soberly.

"Shall I stay in the boat?" suggested Miss Phipps a little later, as they tied up at the Erwin dock.

"Certainly not," said Waldo. "Clay is a good character-study for you, and as your editor I insist that you give him the full treatment."

Miss Phipps climbed meekly up the path behind him. At the top they were met by a dignified butler, bald, lined, and adipose, who led them into the large airy living room of the Erwin camp.

"Good morning, Pearson," said Waldo.

"Good morning, sir. I regret that Mr. Clayton is not up yet," said Pearson in an accent which revealed his origin.

"You're English—a fellow-countryman," said Miss Phipps.

"Yes, madam," said Pearson, bowing. "I encountered the late Mr. John Clayton Erwin in France in the First World War and have been butler in the family ever since. My wife too is English."

"I hate to interrupt you two at your old-home week," said Waldo, "but I have an urgent telegram for Mr. Erwin."

The butler hesitated. "It is beyond my instructions to waken Mr. Clayton before he summons me," he said.

("He's accustomed to his master lying blotto with a hangover," decided Miss Phipps with malice.)

Waldo exclaimed impatiently and strode toward an inner door.

"Would you care for a little refreshment, madam? A cup of coffee? A pot of tea? My wife would be happy to prepare it," said Pearson.

Miss Phipps was about to decline when she was interrupted by a loud shout from Waldo, who came rushing out to them in obvious terror; his face white.

"Clayton's dead!" he cried.

"Oh, no, sir," said Pearson calmly. "Mr. Clayton often appears somewhat lifeless after a little overindulgence the previous night. Last night, Mrs. Clayton being absent, he was a trifle—under the weather, shall I say—when I took him another bottle of whiskey about eleven o'clock."

"Don't be a fool, man," panted Waldo. "His brains are strewn all over the pillow."

The butler, his face a mask of horror, rushed into the bedroom. Miss Phipps followed. Both soon withdrew; the facts were as Waldo had stated them. It was an unpleasant sight.

"He's been murdered!" gasped Pearson

"What makes you think of murder?" demanded Waldo roughly.

"Mr. Clayton would never kill himself, sir—he likes himself too well. It might have been an accident, perhaps?"

"I don't see how you can have an accident with a deer rifle, while lying horizontally in bed in silk pajamas," said Waldo. "The gun's on the floor at the foot of his bed. Was it his own gun, I wonder? Yes, probably it was," he answered himself, pointing to an empty place in the rack beside the hearth. "Did you hear any shot during the night, Pearson?"

"Not to distinguish from other shots in the woods, sir," stammered Pearson. "There will be fingerprints on the gun, perhaps?"

"I doubt it," said Waldo. "I must ask you, Pearson, to stay here on the island, with your wife, while I go down the lake and notify the police. I shall lock the bedroom door and take the key with me. Don't touch anything."

"Certainly not, sir," said Pearson.

"This dock is under observation, clear if distant, from my camp," continued Waldo, "so any attempt to leave would be instantly noticed."

"I have no desire to leave, sir," said Pearson with dignity.

"Were you attached to your master, Pearson?" asked Miss Phipps.

The butler hesitated. "Mr. Clayton was very charming as a little boy," he said. "After his father died and he inherited so much wealth, he became spoiled. Of late years my wife and I would, I own, have been glad to leave his service, but we should have found it difficult to obtain fresh suitable posts at our age. We are very fond of Mrs. Clayton," he added wistfully.

"I feel this is all wrong, Phippsy," said Waldo as they hurried down the path. "I oughtn't to leave the body, I oughtn't to leave the Pearsons alone. But you can't drive the boat, so I can't stay there myself, and I don't fancy leaving you there alone with the Pearsons. Suppose one of them is the murderer? Not that I think it likely—what the old chap said about the difficulty of finding a new place at his age is true enough, so why should he kill off his present employer?"

"How old is his wife?" inquired Miss Phipps.

"Every month as old as he is," said Waldo, casting off, "and plainer if possible. Erwin hasn't been playing round with her, if that's in your mind. Now if their daughter had been living here—but she hasn't; she married years ago and went to California. And their son is in England—married and stayed there after the war. No, I can't see either of the Pearsons firing a bullet into Erwin's head. But who

else could it have been? This is an island, you know—a murderer can't just drop in and out . . . I think I'd better take you back to our camp, Phippsy, before I go for the police—I may be hours with them."

The roaring of the engine made further conversation difficult.

"How far is your camp from Erwin's, Waldo?" shouted Miss Phipps.

"About two miles," shouted Waldo.

When they approached the Stone camp, they saw Louella at the window, with Randall at her side, both waving to them cheerfully. Waldo cut off the engine.

"This is going to be a very unpleasant affair, Phippsy," said Waldo. "So many people round the lake have reason to dislike Clayton Erwin. The police will ferret everything out. It will be a mess."

"Still, as you say, the Erwins' camp is on an island," said Miss Phipps.

Waldo glanced at her sharply. "If you have any bright ideas about solving the murder, Phippsy," he said, "produce them—and fast!"

"I think I know who the murderer is," said Miss Phipps thoughtfully.

"What!" barked Waldo.

"Only there are one or two details I should like to check first."

She outlined her plan.

"Well, okay, why not?" said Waldo. "What do we have to lose?"

Miss Phipps, leaning forward, surreptitiously took possession of the whistle which lay in the dashboard compartment.

The murderer paddled the canoe toward the Erwin camp.

"Though I don't see what we're going to do when we get there."

"Neither do I," said Miss Phipps thoughtfully. "I don't think the Pearsons murdered Clayton Erwin, do you? No motive."

"They had a strong motive *not* to do so," said the murderer emphatically. "Besides, to point a gun at a man's head from a yard away, and fire, takes more nerve than an old fellow like Pearson is likely to have."

("The usual pathological conceit of the criminal showing its ugly head," thought Miss Phipps. "He means: 'Pearson couldn't but *I* could.'")

Aloud she said, "He was a soldier once."

"Forty years ago."

"We acquit the Pearsons then, do we? Although they did have the best opportunity . . . Perhaps it would be well to consider all the suspects under the headings of motive and opportunity?"

"It would be better," said the murderer, "to leave it all to the police."

"I'm hoping to clear up the case before the police arrive," said Miss Phipps. The murderer gave her a sudden grim look, and she continued rather nervously, "The people with motives are Louella, the Firbaums, the Normans, Randall, old Ben. Of these, the motives of the Normans and Ben belong to the past; the murder, if committed by them, would spring from revenge for wrongs already inflicted. Now old Ben, I think, has had his revenge: I think it was he who reported Clayton Erwin to the authorities, resulting in the hunting license having been revoked."

"Your analysis so far is excellent," said the murderer. "I agree."

"As for Leslie Norman, it's true he expressed a desire for revenge on Erwin. But he had no opportunity, I think. The boy Tom had a restless night—a statement confirmed by the doctor who had heard the child's own account—so the Normans must have been up several times during the night to comfort him. Therefore, Leslie Norman could not have slipped away to murder Erwin without his departure being noticed. Of course the whole question of opportunity is a very difficult one," said Miss Phipps. "The Erwins' camp being an island, you know."

"You are omitting Colonel Merriam from consideration?" said the murderer.

"I acquit Colonel Merriam on grounds of character, and his sons because they were absent," she said. "His wife and daughters-in-law of course I haven't met. But I acquit the whole family from lack of opportunity. Imagine any murderer trying to slip away quietly in the night from that camp! Those dogs! Whoever tried to leave or return, at least four of them would bark their heads off! The Colonel's command to stop them is a pretty loud bark too."

"True," said the murderer.

"As for Louella," began Miss Phipps.

"Louella surely has no motive."

"I'm afraid she has," said Miss Phipps soberly. "But, I am glad to say, no opportunity. If she had tried to start a motor at our camp, we should all have been wakened by the noise. As for a canoe—the two canoes are on stands and they make a grating noise when pulled across the dock. I doubt, too, if Louella has the strength to launch one. Yes, it is this question of transport which is decisive," she continued. "Consider the Firbaums, for example. Their motive is clear. But they are 'not good with the boat,' you remember? Can you

imagine either of them making their way *quietly* across the lake in the dark? Their motive rests on Erwin's objection to the noise they make when they attempt to boat. Yes, the question of transport is, I repeat, decisive."

"How did the murderer reach the Erwins' island then?"

"He swam. I woke up early on Wednesday morning and saw damp footprints, pointing inwards to the camp, on the Stones' dock. The sun had not yet risen to dry them."

"But Erwin was alive later that Wednesday morning—we all saw him."

"Quite. Wednesday's swimming performance was your *rehearsal*. For some date when you hoped Virginia would be safely absent—for you love Virginia, don't you? I didn't realize the significance of the footprints on the dock at the time, of course."

"What first put you on to me?" asked the murderer.

"It was a matter of literary history, my dear Randall," said Miss Phipps. "You were so sensitive about Lord Byron yesterday afternoon. Byron was a poet, like you, and lame, like you. Because other sports were closed to him he made himself into an exceptionally strong swimmer. So did you—I noticed when I first saw you at the dock that your bathing suit bore the insignia of an athletic club. Byron swam the Hellespont, you remember—the strait between Asia Minor and Europe, the one Leander swam in classical times to see his girl—about four miles."

"I get your point, and I'm sorry," began Randall, "because as it is—"

"That's the trouble, you see," said Miss Phipps sorrowfully, shaking her head. "One murder so often leads to another. I felt some sympathy for you about the first. I must warn you that I'm wearing a lifejacket," she added hastily.

"That won't help you any after a hard crack on the head with this paddle."

"A dangerous drifting log? I see. But my body will float."

"Not after my well-meant but futile attempts at rescue."

Miss Phipps plucked the whistle from her capacious bosom and blew three loud blasts. At the Stones' dock the speedboat started with a roar.

Randall was silent, then he said with surprising calm, "You win, Miss Phipps." He sprang up, tilting the canoe, and threw himself into the lake. "Give my love to Virginia," he said.

He disappeared from view and did not rise again.

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